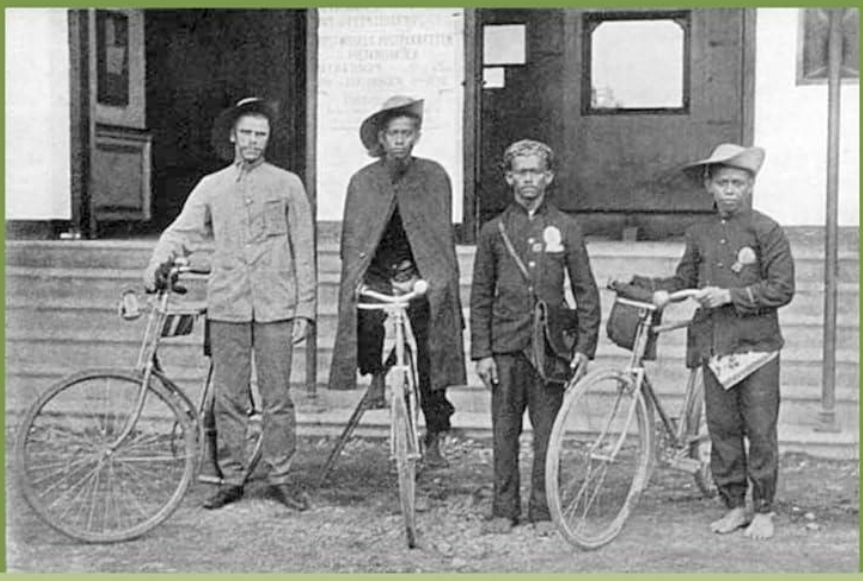
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Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s



JOHN INGLESON

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Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s

By

John Ingleson



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PREFACE

This book is a sequel to my earlier book on the history of the Indonesian labour movement, *In Search of Justice. Workers and Unions in Colonial Java, 1908–1926*.[1] It has been a long time in the making. University administrative responsibilities have delayed it to the point where only 'retirement' to a renewed scholarly life has made its completion possible. It covers the second stage of the history of the Indonesian labour movement, between the ill-conceived PKI rebellions of late 1926 and early 1927 and the Japanese occupation in March 1942. The labour movement has its own history—or histories—but at the same time had an important role in the development of the idea of Indonesia and the evolution of the nationalist political movement. As the title suggests there is an emphasis on the inter-relationships between urban workers, labour unions and nationalist political parties, not only at the leadership level but also at the level of ordinary members.

The history of the Indonesian labour movement has to be written without the benefit of union archives. The Japanese occupation, the war of independence between 1945 and 1949, and the turmoil of the 1950s resulted in records being lost or destroyed. Some union correspondence and internal documents have survived in official files and in the records of other organisations, but in a fragmentary way and usually only from moments of perceived crisis. The only extant private papers of Indonesian labour activists are a few letters sent to Dutch socialists or labour leaders in the colony. Some of the material seized by the police also includes official union correspondence, but this is limited. The private papers of some of the prominent Dutch socialists and labour activists in the colony include documents that shed light on Indonesian as well as European labour unions.

The absence of union archives is compensated to some extent by the obsessive surveillance of Indonesian society by the colonial state. It collected vast amounts of information on what was going on, or at least what it thought was going on, in the workplaces and the unions. Police regularly raided union offices and the homes of union leaders looking for incriminating documents. The political intelligence service had an extensive network of informers inside workplaces, kampung, and unions themselves,

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[1] John Ingleson, *In Search of Justice. Workers and Unions in Colonial Java, 1908–1926* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986).

which often intercepted copies of internal reports and correspondence. Some of this was compiled into folders and sent to the Netherlands in order to reassure the Minister of Colonies that the colonial government had everything under control. Local managements of the private railway companies and the sugar factories also felt obliged to keep their directors in the Netherlands informed about what was happening and how they too had the situation under control.

In the absence of the strikes and union militancy that had enraged both government and employers immediately after the First World War and in the early 1920s, after 1926 less documentation on Indonesian labour unions found its way into the files of the Ministry of Colonies and the archives of companies. The police and local authorities probably continued to collect considerable material on what was going on in the workplaces and the kampung, though they raided union offices less frequently. Most never made it past the General Secretariat in Batavia. Without strikes or uprisings, the Batavian government felt no compulsion to send more than minimal information to The Hague. The archives of the General Secretariat in Jakarta has been a source of some valuable material, but systematic accessibility awaits the completion of the huge task of creating detailed finding tools. Much local level official documentation was misplaced or destroyed in the aftermath of the Japanese occupation, the war of independence and the difficulties of the 1950s and 1960s.

Given the lack of union archives and the paucity of official reports, a history of the second phase of the Indonesian labour movement is heavily dependent on publications produced by unions themselves. They are the basis for the stories in this book of individual unions and of the workers who joined them. Here again many have not survived, especially those produced by the smaller unions and unions for workers in the private sector. Those that have survived are a rich source on union activities at both central and local levels. They include minutes of executive and branch meetings, notes on negotiations with employers and copies of union correspondence with government and managements. Most also published letters from members, which provide a different insight into issues of concern to union members, or at least to those who were literate. The publications of Indonesian labour unions are complemented by publications of European labour unions, many of which sustained a deep interest in the activities of their Indonesian counterparts.

The Indonesian-language press is an invaluable source for any historian writing about the late colonial period. Despite press restrictions, it was a

remarkably vibrant mix of news reporting, investigative journalism and strong editorial opinion, which often included fierce attacks on political opponents. Journalism attracted many talented Indonesians who did not want to work in what they saw as a hierarchical and stultifying colonial civil service. They were well read in English and Dutch language literature and were imbued with a passion to shape the social, economic and political future of the colony. The major newspapers had a strong international orientation, reporting regularly on events in Europe and the United States as well as on the nationalist movement in India and the tumultuous events in China.

Indonesian-language newspapers devoted considerable space to issues that affected urban workers. Urban workers were, after all, a major part of their readership. Congresses, public rallies and local meetings of labour unions were widely covered. Journalists regularly investigated workers' grievances, and interviewed workers outside their workplaces or in their homes. Industrial disputes were also reported, with analysis not just of the causes of disputes but of the social and economic conditions in which Indonesians worked and lived. Reporters and editors had to be careful to avoid being charged with inciting disturbances of the peace (or worse). Many were fined or jailed for transgressing the oppressive press laws.

The major Dutch-language newspapers in the colony and the files of newspaper clippings on labour unions compiled by Dutch socialists and labour activists are also important sources. Much of the Dutch-language colonial press was antagonistic to Indonesian labour unions, seeing little difference between their activities and the activities of political 'agitators'. They were not much better disposed towards European labour union, particularly those aligned with the social-democratic movement. However, a small number of Dutch-language newspapers were sympathetic and provided a more balanced coverage of Indonesian and European labour unions activities. Newspapers and union magazines, frequently reprinted articles from each other, thereby providing material from publications that have subsequently disappeared.

A Note on Spelling

The spelling of Indonesian words has changed since independence. I have generally used current spelling (e.g. 'u' , 'c' or 'y' instead of the earlier 'oe', 'tj' or 'j') when referring to place names or titles of organisations. I have

referred to Batavia—the colonial name for the capital of Indonesia—rather than its post-independence name of Jakarta—except where I judged that Indonesians were deliberately using the 'nationalist' name. I have retained the original spelling of the titles of magazines, newspapers and other published material. I have also generally spelt Indonesian names in the manner most commonly used in the 1920s and 1930s, with the exception that I have used 'u' instead of 'oe'.

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Any historian owes a considerable debt to scholars in many fields and disciplines whose writings have influenced their thinking. My debts are far too numerous to specify but I have duly acknowledged those whose work I have directly drawn on in writing this book. Over nearly 40 years I have enjoyed the support and collegiality of historians at the University of New South Wales and, after a significant period in academic administration and leadership at UNSW and the University of Western Sydney, in 'retirement' I am delighted to be back participating in the on-going discussions about how to write history.

Libraries and archives are essential for the historian. This book could not have been written without the rich collection of labour union magazines and colonial era Indonesian-language newspapers held in the National Library of Indonesia. I am grateful to the staff of that Library for their constant efforts to find material, and their readiness to provide photocopies and microfilms. The National Archives of Indonesia was also an important source of documentation, as was the National Archives, the Royal Library, the International Institute of Social History and the KITLV in the Netherlands. Australian university libraries, and especially the library of the University of New South Wales, also have growing collections on colonial Indonesia to which generations of scholars have contributed. The professionalism of staff in all these libraries and archives is gratefully acknowledged. I would particularly like to thank Iskandar Nugroho for his research assistance in Indonesia.

My major debt is to Anne O'Brien, who has shared life with me and, as a distinguished historian herself, contributed more than she probably realises through the countless conversations we have had over the years about the teaching and writing of history. Anne and my daughters, Elizabeth and Katherine, have put up with the creation of this book for a very long time. I am grateful for their patience, their support and their love.



PANCASILA



1. KETUHANAN YANG MAHA ESA
2. KEMANUSIAAN YANG ADIL DAN BERADAB
3. PERSATUAN INDONESIA
4. KERAKYATAN YANG DIPIMPIN OLEH HIKMAT KEBIJAK-SANAAN DALAM PERMUSYAWARATAN / PERWAKILAN
5. KEADILAN SOSIAL BAGI SELURUH RAKYAT INDONESIA

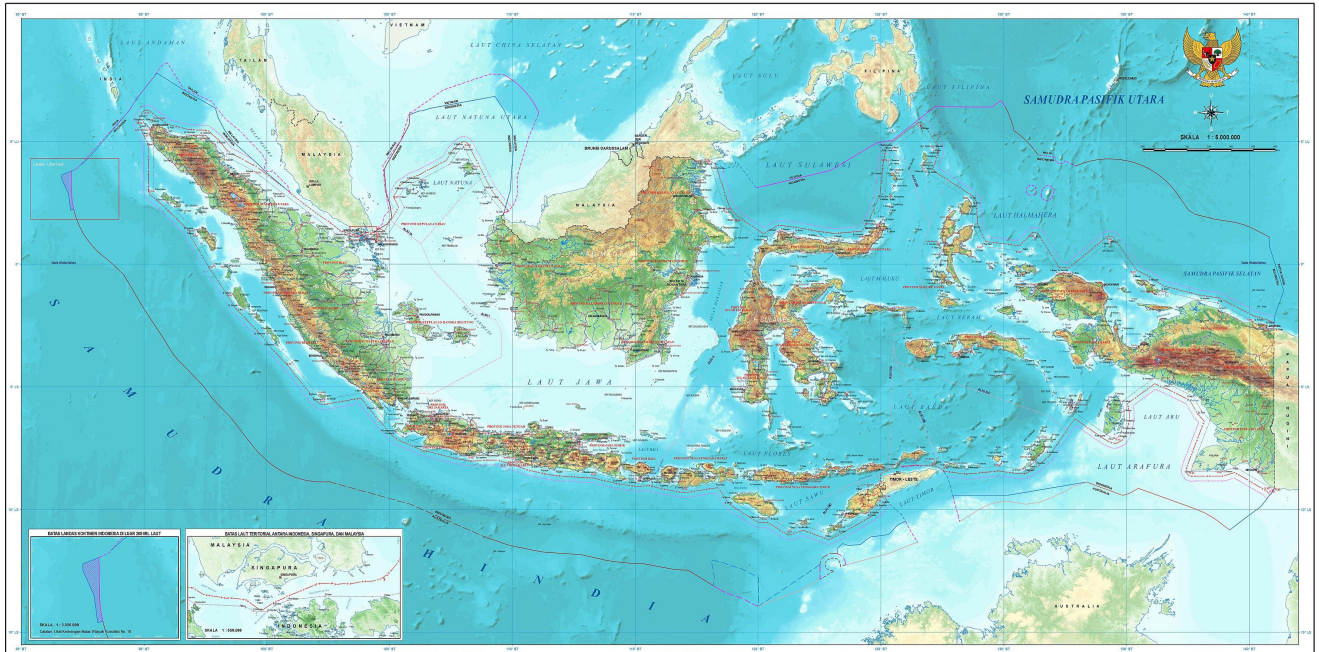
ABBREVIATIONS

ANRI	National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia
BBL	Bezoldigingsregeling Burgerlijke Landsdienaren (Salary Regulations for Civil Servants)
BIC	Bond Indonesische Chauffeur (Union of Indonesian drivers)
BPM	Bataviaasche Petroleum Maatschappij (Batavian Oil Company)
CIVO	Indische Vakorganisatie van Overheidspersoneel (Labour Organisation for Indies Government workers)
CPBI	Centraal Perhimpunan Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Labour Union Federation)
GAPI	Gabungan Politik Indonesia (Indonesian Political Federation)
GASPI	Gabungan Sarekat Sekerja Partikulier Indonesia (Federation of Indonesian Private Sector Workers)
Gerindo	Gerakan Rakyat Indonesia (Movement of the Indonesian People)
HIOC	Hollandsch-Inlandsche Onderwijs Commissie (Dutch-Native Education Commission)
HIS	Hollandsch-Inlandsche School (Dutch-Native School)
IISG	International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam
IPO	Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisch-Chineesche Pers, (Survey of the Native and Malay-Chinese Press)
ISDP	Indische Sociaal Democratische Partij (Indies Social Democratic Party)
KPM	Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (Royal Shipping Company)
Midpost	Middelbaar Personeel bij de Post-, Telegraaf, en Telfoondienst in Nederlandsche-Indie (Union of Middle Level Workers in the Post, Telegraph and Telephone Service in the Netherlands Indies)
MULO	Meer Uitgebried Lager Onderwijs (More Extended Lower Education)
NA	National Archives of the Netherlands
NIOG	Nederlandsch-Indische Onderwijzersgenootschap (Netherlands Indies Teachers Association)
NIS	Nederlands-Indies Spoorweg Maatschappij (Netherlands Indies Railway Company)
NSB	Normaal School Bond (Normal School Union)

NVV	Nederlands Verbond van Vakvereenigingen (Netherlands Federation of Labour Unions)
Parindra	Partai Indonesia Raya (Greater Indonesia Party)
Partindo	Partai Indonesia (Indonesia Party)
PBI	Persatuan Bangsa Indonesia (Union of the Indonesian Nation)
PBKI	Persatuan Buruh Kareta Api Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Railway Workers)
PBRI	Persatuan Buruh Rendahan Indonesia (Union for Low Level Indonesian Workers)
PBST	Perhumpunan Beambte Klas II Spoor dan Tram di Hindia Belanda (Union for Second Class Rail and Tram Workers in the Netherlands Indies)
PFB	Personeel Fabrieksbond (Sugar Factory Workers Union)
PGB	Perserikatan Guru Bond (Assistant Teachers' Union)
PGHB	Persatuan Guru Hindia Belanda (Union of Indies Teachers)
PGI	Persatuan Guru Indonesia (Indonesian Teachers' Union)
PID	Politieke Inlichtingen Dienst (Political Intelligence Service)
PKI	Perserikatan Kommunist di India (Indies Communist Party)
PKVB	Perhimpunan Kaum Verplegers (sters) dan Vroedvrouwen Bumiputera (Union of Native Nurses and Midwives)
PKVI	Perhimpunan Kaum Verplegers (sters) dan Vroedvrouwen Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Nurses and Midwives)
PNI	Perserikatan Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Association)
PNI Baru	Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Education)
PPBB	Perhimpunan Pegawai Bestuur Bumiputera (Union of Native Civil Servants)
PPKB	Persatuan Pergerakan Kaum Buruh (Federation of Indonesian Labour Unions)
PPO	Politiek-Politioneel Overzicht (Political Intelligence Survey)
PPPB	Perserikatan Pegawai Pegadaian Bumiputra (Union of Native Pawnshop Workers)
PPPH	Perserikatan Pegawei Pegadaian Hindia (Union of Indies Pawnshop Workers)
PPPKI	Permufakatan Perhimpunan-Perhimpunan Politik Kebangsaan Indonesia (Association of Political Organisations of the Indonesian People)
PPPT	Persatuan Pegawei Partikelir Tramlijnen Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Workers in Private Tramways)

PPST	Persatuan Pegawai Spoor dan Tram (Union of Railway and Tramway Workers)
PSI	Partai Sarekat Islam
PSII	Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia
PSPTT	Persatuan Sekerdja Post- Telegraaf en Telefoondienst di Indonesia (Union of Workers in the Post, Telegraph and Telephone Service in Indonesia)
PSSI	Persatuan Sarekat Sekerja Indonesia (Federation of Indonesian Unions)
PTTR	Perhimpunan Pegawai Post- Telegraaf, Telefoon, Radiodienst Rendahan (Union for Low Level Workers in the Post, Telegraph, Telephone and Radio Service)
PVH	Persatuan Vakbond Hindia (Indies Labour Federation)
PVPN	Persatuan Vakbond Pegawei Negeri (Federation of Public Sector Unions)
SCI	Sarekat Chauffeur Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Drivers)
SI	Sarekat Islam
SKBI	Sarekat Kaum Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Workers' Association)
SSI	Sarekat Sekerja Indonesia (Indonesian Workers' Union)
VIPBOW	Vereeniging Inlandsch Personeel Burgerlijke Openbare Werken (Union of Native Employees in the Public Works Department)
VSTP	Vereeniging van Spoor- en Tramweg Personeel (Union of Railway and Tramway Workers)
VVL	Verbond van Vereenigingen van Landsdienaren (Association of Unions of Public Sector Workers)
VVO	Verbond van Vereenigingen van Overheidsdienaren (Association of Unions of Civil Servants)

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Landas Kontinen Indonesia di Luar 200 MIL Laut

Singkatan :

P.	Pulau
Kep.	Kepulauan
S.	Selat
Tg.	Tanjung
P.	Pulau
K.	Kepulauan
Sr.	Siri
T.	Tim
S.	Sangat
K.	Kecil
B.	Barat
T.	Timur
U.	Utara
S.	Selatan

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	200 - 1000 m
	100 - 200 m
	50 - 100 m
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	0 - 5 m

Kedalaman :

0 - 25 m	
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PETA NEGARA KESATUAN REPUBLIK INDONESIA

Peta ini menggambarkan wilayah kedaulatan Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia di darat dan laut, baik berupa laut teritorial (laut wilayah), perairan kepulauan, dan perairan pedalaman, serta hak kedaulatan Indonesia di Zona Tambahan, Zona Ekonomi Eksklusif, dan Landas Kontinen. Penggambaran wilayah kedaulatan Indonesia di laut mengacu pada Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 6 Tahun 1996 tentang Perairan Indonesia, serta sesuai dengan prinsip-prinsip hukum internasional. Peta ini dibuat berdasarkan batas Negara yang telah disepakati antara Republik Indonesia dengan negara-negara tetangganya.

KONTRIBUTOR

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14. Undang-Undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah.
15. Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 2017 tentang Perubahan Kedua Undang-Undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2006 tentang Administrasi Kependudukan.
16. Undang-Undang Nomor 7 Tahun 2017 tentang Pemilihan Umum.
17. Undang-Undang Nomor 6 Tahun 1996 tentang Perairan Indonesia.
18. Undang-Undang Nomor 43 Tahun 2008 tentang Wilayah Negara.

NEGARA KESATUAN REPUBLIK INDONESIA

Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (NKRI) merupakan Negara Kepulauan (Archipelagic State) yang berbatasan dengan 10 (sepuluh) negara, 3 (tiga), Indonesia berbatasan dengan Malaysia, Papua Nugini, dan Timor-Leste, Sebanyak 41 laut, Indonesia berbatasan dengan India, Malaysia, Singapura, Filipina, Vietnam, Palau, Papua Nugini, Australia, dan Timor-Leste.

I. WILAYAH DARAT NKRI

Wilayah darat NKRI terdiri atas daratan pada semua pulau yang tersebar di wilayah dalam garis pangkal Kepulauan Indonesia. Khusus di P. Kalimantan, P. Sebatik, P. Papua dan P. Timor berbatasan dengan perairan sebagai berikut:

1. Batas negara dengan Malaysia di P. Kalimantan dan Sebatik mengacu kepada perjanjian batas antara Pemerintah Inggris dan Pemerintah Belanda tanggal 20 Juni 1891 dan 28 September 1915, Perjanjian Indonesia dan Malaysia tanggal 27 April 1928, 12 Mei 1958, 7 Maret 1970, 10 Juni 1973, 22 Januari 1979, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) tanggal 26 November 1973 tentang Pengukuran Bersama Batas Darat, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) tanggal 29 Desember 1976 tentang Pengukuran Bersama Batas Darat, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) tanggal 29 Desember 1976 tentang Pengukuran Bersama Batas Darat, Exchange of Notes tanggal 10 Juni 1997 dan 29 Juli 1997 tentang Pengukuran Bersama Batas Darat, Agreement tanggal 11 November 1997 tentang Pengukuran Bersama Batas Darat, Agreement tanggal 12 November 1997 tentang Pengukuran Bersama Batas Darat, Agreement tanggal 13 November 1997 tentang Pengukuran Bersama Batas Darat, Agreement tanggal 14 November 1997 tentang Pengukuran Bersama Batas Darat, Agreement tanggal 15 November 1997 tentang 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INTRODUCTION

The late 1910s and early 1920s were heady days for the political and labour movements in Indonesia. Sarekat Islam and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) competed to attract urban and rural support. In Takashi Shiraishi's memorable phrase, it was 'An Age in Motion', a time when so much seemed possible, for the labour movement as well as the political movement.[1] Following the end of the First World War, Indonesian workers sought to achieve greater wage justice from employers at a time of rising prices and skilled labour shortages. It was a period of labour militancy in the towns and cities of Java, with a strong growth of unions for workers in both the private and public sectors.[2]

Modest gains were achieved by labour unions in these years, but as the colonial state and employers raised the cost of union involvement workers drifted away. The failure of major strikes in the sugar factories in 1919 and 1920, in the pawnshops in 1922, in the railways in 1923 and in the Surabaya engineering workshops in 1925, took a heavy toll on labour union memberships and finances. The European community was nervous and the colonial government was determined to restore 'tranquillity and order'. The communist uprisings at the end of 1926 and the beginning of 1927, and the swift retribution against the PKI and unions associated with it, compounded workers' fears of remaining members of labour unions. The first period of the Indonesian labour movement was at an end. Labour militancy was no longer an option. In future, the space for labour and political activism was far more constrained.

A little over a decade later, on 30 September 1939, more than 400 people gathered in Mojokerto, a small town near Surabaya, East Java, to celebrate a quarter of a century of labour union activism by Raden Panji Suroso. Suroso was born in 1893 in Sidoarjo, East Java and was a graduate of the Teacher Training College (Kweekschool) at Probolinggo, East Java. He did not become a teacher, instead joining the irrigation service. In 1914, aged twenty one, he became chairman of the Probolinggo branch of the Union of Native Employees of the Public Works Department, and began a long

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[1] Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion. Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[2] See, Ingleson, *In Search of Justice.*

career as chairman of numerous public sector unions including the Federation of Public Sector Unions from 1930. Like many labour union leaders he was also involved in nationalist politics. In 1914 he became chairman of the Probolinggo branch of Sarekat Islam and later a member of the party's central executive, although by 1923 he seems no longer to have been an executive member. He was chairman of a branch of the sugar factory workers' union (PFB) during its heyday. His brief membership of Sarekat Islam and involvement with the PFB began a long association in labour unions with Surjopranoto, often referred to as the 'strike king' of Java because of his leadership of the PFB and the pawnshop workers' union during their clashes with employers. Suroso was instrumental in creating the Persatuan Vakbond Hindia (Indies Labour Federation) in 1922 and was its chairman until its collapse after the May 1923 railway strike. He was elected to the Probolinggo Municipal Council and in 1923 appointed to the colony's advisory council, the Volksraad, where for the rest of the colonial period he was a passionate advocate for Indonesian workers.[3]

In the histories of Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s Suroso barely rates a mention. There were many Indonesians who, like Suroso, devoted much of their public lives to labour unions. Some became central leaders of large unions for urban workers, men such as Hindromartono from Batavia, Djoko Said from Bandung, and Ruslan Wongsokusumo from Surabaya. They led multiple unions, edited union magazines, regularly contributed to the Indonesian-language press on local and international labour issues and constantly moved around the towns and cities of Java speaking at branch meetings and encouraging local leaders. Most were also active in social welfare organisations and cooperatives. Many were members of nationalist political parties.

These were the central leaders. Most local level union leaders were wage earners whose union activities rarely extended beyond the town or city in which they worked and lived. They were part of the literate minority of Indonesian workers who read local newspapers and labour union magazines, attended public rallies organised by political parties and no doubt discussed among themselves what needed to be done for Indonesia to become independent and what needed to be done after independence was achieved. For local and central leaders, politics was what they talked about,

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[3] For profiles of Suroso see: *Pemandangan* 15 July 1933, *Soeara Oemoem*, 4 October 1939 and the entry in *Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoeka di Djawa* (Jakarta: Gunseikanbu, 1944), p. 468.

labour activism was what they did. For many, politics was the politics of labour.

Those who have written about Indonesia in the last decades of Dutch colonial rule have assumed that there was little or no labour union activity in the colony after 1926, or at least little of any consequence. This book argues otherwise. These were important years for the labour movement. Unions had to recover from the crackdown by the colonial state and then cope with the impact of the 1930s Depression. Union leaders did not disown the earlier, militant, phase—indeed some, like Surjopranoto and Reksodiputro had been in the thick of it—but their narratives now emphasised the importance of acting within the constraints imposed by a repressive state. They would continue to represent workers' interests to employers and to government as vigorously as they could. They would continue to exert as much pressure as they could on the colonial state through newspapers and magazines, public rallies, direct lobbying and support from sympathisers in the Volksraad and in the Netherlands. But they were convinced that a strategy of accommodation rather than confrontation was the only way they could rebuild the labour movement.

There is no unitary, continuous or triumphant narrative in the history of the Indonesian labour movement. Rather there are multiple, sometimes conflicting, narratives drawing together stories of individual unions, each with successes and failures. There was much that divided the labour movement, including differences of class, ethnicity, gender and ideology, as well as personal disputes between leaders. Labour unions were very diverse, ranging from small organisations of a few hundred people to the large teachers' and railway workers' unions, each with over ten thousand members. Despite this diversity, labour activists yearned for the creation of one united, powerful voice for workers. The search for unity in the labour movement was a common theme in union narratives.

It is important to avoid the danger of writing history backwards. Indonesian labour union leaders did not have the benefit of hindsight. They did not know that Japan would invade the colony in 1942 and that three years later Indonesia would declare its independence. While there was much talk in the 1920s and the 1930s about the rise of Japan and the possibility of Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia, labour union leaders assumed that they were engaged in a long-term project. They believed that a major task was to educate Indonesian workers to see labour unions as part of a broader international movement. They believed that they needed to develop a stronger civil society and that union-owned mutual benefit funds,

libraries, educational activities and social and sporting clubs were essential to this. Their knowledge of international labour history convinced them that unions could only reach their full potential in a democratic society but they also believed that a democratic society on its own would not guarantee better wages and conditions for workers. Only labour unions could achieve this.

The failure of the 1920s strike waves and the suppression of unions connected to the PKI were firmly etched on the minds of those who continued to try to organise urban workers. The colonial state had established the boundaries of what was possible. For the rest of the colonial period it retained strict limits on the activities of labour unions. Some labour activists openly challenged these limits, in the process paying a heavy price. Most accepted the realities of colonial rule. They tried to protect workers' wages and conditions and resolve industrial issues through negotiations and public pressure. They focussed on building enduring linkages through the provision of social security, cooperatives and educational and recreational programs. They were involved in creating a stronger civil society and believed that in doing so they were contributing to the broader nationalist agenda of freeing Indonesia from colonial rule. Creating strong labour unions was an important step on the (long) road to independence.

The first phase of the Indonesian labour movement was shaped by the post-First World War economic boom and the inflation that accompanied it. Labour militancy was a common response throughout the western and the colonial worlds. The second phase of the Indonesian labour movement was shaped by the world-wide Depression. Labour unions everywhere were forced onto the defensive. Unemployment, poverty, and people living on the streets, were common sights in towns and cities. Workers were desperate to survive, and even in democratic western societies there was a reduced appetite for direct confrontation of employers. In colonial Indonesia the legal constraints made direct confrontation impossible.

Despite the draconian laws at the disposal of the state, the European community in colonial Indonesia was concerned that the Depression would lead to urban unrest. It was particularly worried that unemployed urban Indonesians would provide a fertile recruitment ground for nationalist agitators. The government's concern about the potential consequences of the social and economic impact of the Depression influenced its decision to tighten already stringent controls over all nationalist activities. In 1933 and 1934 it banned the two major nationalist political parties, Partai Indonesia (Partindo) and Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia (PNI Baru)

and exiled their leaders from Java. In making an example of these two parties, neither of which in any real sense threatened the colonial state, it was warning the nationalist political elite of the limits of dissent. The repression was effective. There was no serious political challenge to the colonial state until the Japanese occupation.

In the eyes of the colonial government the Indonesian labour movement was inseparable from the wider nationalist movement. Monthly political intelligence reports prepared by the Attorney-General's office always had a section on the labour movement. While union leaders insisted that they were focussed on an industrial agenda and on meeting workers' immediate social and economic needs, they were well aware that in a colony all labour union activity was in a deep sense anti-colonial. Indeed, unions proudly associated themselves with the wider nationalist agenda. It could not be otherwise when capital and management, as well as the power of the state, were in the hands of Europeans. The colonial government's suspicion of labour unions was deepened by the nationalist symbols that adorned the halls and cinemas used for their public meetings. Portraits of 'national heroes' hung on the walls, podiums were dressed with red and white flags and the 'national anthem', the Indonesia Raya, was sung with gusto before or after meetings.

Despite the close connections between the two, the labour movement should not be seen simply as an appendage of the grander narrative of the political movement and its drive for independence. It was a movement in its own right, with goals that went beyond the achievement of independence. Labour unions gave a voice to otherwise voiceless urban workers. A voice for greater social justice, for stronger legal protections and for improved opportunities. They created a discourse of social rights and wage justice for workers. It was a discourse based on the knowledge that the romantic Java of the past was rapidly giving way to an urban Java of impoverished wage earners. Their industrial and social justice agendas influenced the platforms of the nationalist political parties and became the basis for worker demands after independence. The story of the Indonesian labour movement in the last decade and a half of colonial rule is an important part of the story of Indonesia.

During these years, labour union leaders grappled with fundamental questions as they sought to create unions that would survive a repressive colonial state and be the basis for a long-term movement. What should be the relationship between labour unions and political parties? Should labour unions be independent or sub-units of political parties? Should

unions be led by 'insiders', who were workers themselves, or by 'outsiders', who were less exposed to intimidation by employers? How much energy should be devoted to the provision of social security for members? What should be the relationship with labour unions for Europeans and Eurasians in the colony? Would workers' interests be better served by the creation of a Labour Party? It was a time of lively, sometimes heated, debate. Some of these issues were resolved, others remained the subject of contentious debates after independence.

Before the communist uprisings in late 1926 and early 1927, workers in the private sector had been just as strongly unionised as workers in the public sector. Harbour workers, sailors, sugar factory workers, and workers in the Surabaya engineering workshops as well as drivers and workers in the private railway companies were all drawn to labour unions in large numbers. The failure of the strike waves, the destruction of the PKI which had been committed to organising urban workers, and the tougher approach of employers, made it much more difficult to persuade workers in the private sector to join unions. The collapse of the Java sugar industry in the Depression years along with sharp reductions in plantation exports had an enormous impact on urban employment, especially in Surabaya workshops and engineering companies, in the harbours and in the private railways, all areas where unions had been strong. Efforts were made in the late 1920s and early 1930s to create new unions for workers in the private sector, especially in Surabaya, but as the Depression deepened these had only limited success. Renewed efforts in the late 1930s, when the economy was beginning to recover, were showing signs of success only to be cut short by the Japanese occupation.

The labour movement after 1926 was dominated by unions for workers in the public sector. Some of these workers were relatively well paid and, at least until the Depression, had secure employment, prospects for promotion, child allowances, and small pensions on retirement. However, the vast majority of workers employed by the government and government-owned industries were not so fortunate. They had low wages, and a high proportion were monthly or daily wage earners with no certainty of employment, no allowances and no provision for holidays or pensions. Three of the largest employers in the colony were the State Railways, the Post, Telegraph, Telephone and Radio Service and the Department of Education. In 1929, the State Railways employed 43,341 Indonesian and Chinese workers, of whom only 6,335 were employed on a permanent basis. Some 26,923 were

temporary workers and a further 10,033 were casual day-wage labourers.[4] In 1936 the Post Office employed over 15,000 low level Indonesian workers, of which one-third were casual workers.[5] Over 40,000 Indonesians were employed as teachers in public schools in 1930, but the majority were low paid village teachers or assistant teachers. Given the large numbers of low paid workers it is not surprising that the railways, the post office and the teaching service were three of the most unionised workplaces.

In this second phase of the Indonesian labour movement, unions focussed on urban workers in the formal sector of the urban economy. This was difficult enough given the constraints imposed by the colonial state. Only rarely were attempts made to organise among the larger number of people working in the informal sector of the urban economy. In a sense there was no one to organise informal sector workers against. It would have been different if there had been elections to contest, with the need to gather a mass vote and the ability to pressure a representative government to improve the lives of the labouring poor. There would then have been a strong incentive to compete for these votes by organising among them.[6] As it was, the electorate for the Municipal Councils was so restricted that it was the elite talking to the elite.[7]

There was, however, no hard divide between formal and informal sector workers. Most lower paid workers in the towns and cities worked in both sectors. They had no choice. The wages of day-wage labourers and casual workers from their formal sector jobs were too small and too insecure.[8]

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[4] See, Director of Government Industries to Director of Justice, 2 May 1929, in a file "Dactyloscopies 1927–1932", in Binnenlands Bestuur Collection, No. 3555, ANRI.

[5] See, *Orgaan PTTR*, January 1938, p. 25.

[6] The contrast here is most clearly with India in the 1930s where unions and political parties did reach down to much broader levels of the population because there were elections to contest. There is an extensive literature on the history of Indian labour unions. See, Nandini Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[7] In 1925 the franchise was extended to males who were at least 21 years of age, literate in any language, and had an annual taxable income of at least 300 guilders. Women were permitted to stand for election to Municipal Councils from 1938 but were not given the right to vote until 1941. The electorate for the Batavia Municipal Council in 1938 was 8,563 Europeans, 3,468 Indonesians and 718 Foreign Orientals, at a time when the total population of the city was in excess of 600,000. See, *Verslag van de Commissie tot Bestudeering van Staatsrechtelijke Hervormingen* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1941), Part 1, pp. 143–144 and Susan Abeyasekere, *Jakarta. A History* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 118.

[8] A union survey in 1939 of casual day-wage labourers employed in factories in the north Java coastal city of Cirebon reported that many people earned as little as two to five guilders

They added to these meagre wages by working wherever they could in the informal sector. As well, while a man might have a low paid job in the formal sector, his wife, and perhaps his children, were likely to be working in the informal sector. When labour unions recruited day wage and casual workers they were drawing into the union world people who worked in both the formal and informal sectors.

Indonesian labour unions in the late 1920s and the 1930s were essentially Java unions. The one exception was a union for taxi drivers and chauffeurs established in Kalimantan which had a membership largely in Kalimantan and Sumatra. There were also a few locally based unions in Sumatra but they had very small memberships. Some of the major Java-based unions established branches outside Java, most notably the railway workers' union, the teachers' unions and the pawnshop workers' union. But a history of the colonial labour movement is a history of labour unions in Java. Java contained two-thirds of the colony's population, was its administrative centre and was the site for advanced education for Indonesians and Eurasians. The large cities were all in Java, as were the naval bases and much of the defence infrastructure along with most of the modern industry.

The history of Indonesian labour unions cannot be written in isolation from the history of European labour unions in the colony. The 1930 Census estimated that there were 245,000 people in the colony legally classified as Europeans.[9] Of the approximately 60,000 who were employees, two-thirds were employed in the public sector. European workers were strongly unionised. Some European unions were for senior officials and managers who intended to stay only briefly in the colony. They stayed aloof from other unions, whether European or Indonesian. Most were for middle level Indies-born European and Eurasian public sector workers for whom the colony was home. Many of these European unionists were supportive of Indonesian unions, though this support was qualified by fears of what the future might hold as Indonesians were promoted to jobs previously the preserve of Europeans. Despite some fundamentally divergent interests,

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a month. They could not live on this and were forced to obtain additional work elsewhere in the informal economy. See the report in *Soeara Oemoem*, 20 January 1939.

[9] Anthony Low has pointed out that the proportion of Europeans in the Netherlands Indies was about eight times the proportion of Europeans in India and that the ratio of Dutch officials to the Indies populations was fifteen times that of British officials in India. A.D. Low, *Britain and Indian nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 11.

on many issues they found common cause. The colonial government was concerned about what it saw as radical European labour unions and their socialist leaders, and even more concerned about union cooperation across the racial divide, seen most publicly in joint protest meetings in the towns and cities of Java throughout the 1930s.

The absence of significant labour unions for Chinese is noticeable. In 1930 Chinese, both local-born and those born overseas, were 14.4 per cent of the population of Batavia, 12.6 per cent of Semarang and 11.4 per cent of Surabaya.[10] Each city had strong Chinese community organisations that operated schools and provided welfare, recreational facilities, social networks and other support to Chinese workers. Chinese labour unions only emerged during the Depression years and at the end of the colonial era their memberships were very small. The nationalist sentiment of the larger public sector Indonesian unions did not allow Chinese to be members. It was not until the late 1930s that some of the new Indonesian unions for private sector workers opened their membership to Chinese workers. The lack of Chinese labour unions may have reflected the fact that most urban Chinese earned their living as small traders or by working for small Chinese family-owned companies. But Chinese were also employed in ordinary jobs in the harbours, in warehouses, in offices and in the public sector. The social security offered by community associations probably provided many of the benefits that only labour unions offered to Indonesians.[11] Indonesian labour union leaders frequently discussed the place of Chinese workers in the colonial economy, usually critically, but it was a rare leader who openly contemplated allowing Chinese to become members.

The first phase of the Indonesian labour movement was marked by extensive strikes and the drama of conflict between unions, employers and the colonial state. The battery of repressive laws enacted in the 1920s made it impossible for labour unions to organise strikes or in any way to encourage workers to go on strike. This did not stop strikes occurring, but they were localised and the colonial government found no evidence of union involvement. This did not deter large parts of the European press from

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[10] See, H.W. Dick, *Surabaya. City of Work. A socio-economic history, 1900–2000* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002), Table 3.4, p. 125.

[11] For a discussion of Chinese community organisations in Semarang in the colonial period see Donald Earl Willmott, *The Chinese of Semarang: A Changing Minority Community in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960). For a short contemporary discussion of Chinese labour unions see, Nio Joe Lan, "Chineesche Vakvereenigingen in Nederlandsch-Indie", *Koloniale Studien*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1940), pp. 77–93.

seeing even the slightest protest from workers as evidence of union militancy threatening the very foundations of the colony.

While strikes were rare, worker protest was not. Here labour unions played an important role in channelling worker discontent and organising public protest meetings as a way of putting pressure on the colonial government. The government could ban strikes, close down political meetings and arrest and jail newspaper editors but it could not eliminate workers protest without taking actions so drastic as to cause political problems in the Netherlands itself. This was the public space that Indonesian and European labour unions alike used to their advantage.

CHAPTER ONE

MANAGING THE URBAN WORKFORCE

Maintenance of 'tranquillity and order' (rust en orde) was the cornerstone of Dutch colonial policy. In the rural areas it meant keeping a careful eye out for signs of unrest, especially from urban activists trying to politicise rural people. In the towns and cities it meant surveillance of political activities but also of workplaces and the kampung where workers lived. Managing the urban workforce, both permanent residents and the army of seasonal and casual labourers who moved between villages and towns, required constant vigilance. Employers and government alike were particularly wary of the activities of nationalist political parties and labour unions. Both had to be managed and restrained.

The Urban Context

By the end of the nineteenth century the land in Java could no longer support the growing population. Increasing numbers of villagers were forced to become wage labourers, eking out a living as seasonal workers in the foreign-owned plantations and sugar industry. Others drifted into the towns and cities seeking whatever work they could find in the formal or the informal economy. They often returned to their villages at harvest time or for major festivals. Hundreds of thousands from the poorest regions of Central and East Java were enticed into becoming contract labourers for the burgeoning plantations on the East Coast of Sumatra.[1] The surfeit of under-employed people in rural Java provided a labour pool for the towns and cities, keeping wages low and employment precarious.

Women and children also worked outside the home, in both the informal economy and as low paid wage earners. The cigarette industry, the batik industry and the textile industry in small towns in Java were dependent on an abundant supply of cheap female labour. Many young women

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[1] See, Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870–1979* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, second edition, 1995). On the sugar industry see G. Roger Knight, *Commodities and Colonialism* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

drifted to the towns and cities to work as domestic labour for European and middle class Indonesian households. In a society where most people lived from day-to-day, child labour was the norm. Efforts by the colonial government to control it had only limited success in the face of strong opposition from employers, and in particular from the plantation industries.

The towns and cities of Java grew steadily after the colony was opened to private capital in the 1870s. At the turn of the century only the capital city of Batavia, the East Java city of Surabaya and the Central Java court city of Surakarta had populations in excess of 100,000. By 1930 the total population of Java had increased to 42 million, with 4.65 per cent living in towns and cities with more than 50,000 people and 8.7 per cent living in 104 towns and cities with more than 5,000 people. There were six major cities. Batavia had a population of 533,000, Surabaya 341,700, Semarang (on the north coast of Central Java) 217,800, Bandung (the inland city of West Java) 166,800, Surakarta 165,500 and its sister Central Java city of Yogyakarta 136,500.[2]

While many of those who lived in the towns and cities of Java retained strong connections with the village world, often visiting at the end of the Ramadan fasting month for Lebaran festivities, they increasingly saw themselves as urban people. This permanent urban population was supplemented by circular migrants, who probably accounted for as many as 30 per cent of the urban population at peak times of the year. These transient urban workers lived in villages near towns and cities, and travelled to the urban areas seeking work for part of the year. Mostly men, but with an increasing number of young women seeking domestic work, they left their families behind and lived in overcrowded and insanitary kampung in the poorest parts of the towns and cities. They were a major component of day-wage workers and workers in the large informal sector of the urban economy.

In one generation the urban areas of Java were transformed from small towns into bustling cities. The 1930 census reflected the change: about half of the Indonesian population of Batavia, Bandung and Surabaya was city-born. The rest were mostly born in the province in which the city was located.[3] Railway networks radiating from the major cities brought tens of thousands of people from small towns seeking work. The work was low

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[2] *Statistical Pocketbook of Indonesia 1941* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1941), Table 19, p. 13.
[3] *Volkstelling 1930* (Batavia: Landsdrukkeri, 1936), Vol. 18, pp. 122–123.

paid and insecure but provided an income that villages and small towns could not provide.

The major cities were commercial and administrative centres, with only limited industrialisation. In 1934 were were only 5,385 enterprises registered under the Factory Act (employing more than 5 people), of which 3,548 were on Java. They employed 154,988 people, of whom 126,176 were employed in factories and workshops on Java. The number of people registered under the Factory Act increased substantially in the late 1930s. By 1942 there were around 350,000 people employed in factories and workshops, with the increase largely attributable to the rapid expansion of the textile industry on Java as a result of import restrictions. The colonial government remained the major employer, through its bureaucracy, agencies such as the police and education, or through government enterprises such as the railways and the post office.

To the extent that colonial Indonesia had an industrial city, Surabaya was the only candidate. Located on the east coast of Java, it was one of the most important commercial cities in Asia from the mid nineteenth century through to the end of the 1920s.[4] It was the colony's major harbour, the site of its main naval base and the service centre for the enormous sugar industry in East Java. In 1930, 110,165 Indonesians, or 40.6 per cent of the Indonesian population in the city, were wage earners, of whom 72 per cent were male. The four largest employment categories for males were industry (25 per cent of the workforce), day labourers (19 per cent), public administration (15 per cent) and transportation (15 per cent). Of female wage earners, 62 per cent were employed in domestic service, 13 per cent in industry and 13 per cent in trade.[5] The Depression hit Surabaya particularly hard. The collapse of the sugar industry wiped out much of its industry.

After the introduction of the so-called Ethical Policy in 1901, whereby the Netherlands acknowledged its responsibility to improve the welfare of native people in the Indies, there was a steady expansion in basic village schools and western-style primary and secondary schools. A small number of Indonesian graduates from Dutch language secondary schools attended universities in the Netherlands in the 1910s and 1920s, returning to become lawyers, doctors, journalists and other professionals. Alarmed at the

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[4] The most recent comprehensive history of Surabaya is Dick, *Surabaya. City of Work.*

[5] These figures are taken from a table in M.C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), p. 26, which is compiled from the 1930 census.

radicalisation of many of those who had studied in the Netherlands, after 1926 the government reduced the number of scholarships for overseas study, and instead expanded the School of Law in Batavia, the Technical Institute in Bandung and the Medical Schools in Batavia and Surabaya. The expansion of western education came to an end with the onset of the Depression, leaving a low level of literacy in the colony. According to the 1930 Census, only 7.4 per cent of adult Indonesians were literate in any language and a mere 0.32 per cent in Dutch.[6] The ethnic composition of jobs underwent significant changes in the last decades of colonial rule. The expansion of the economy and the growth of government departments meant that jobs previously the preserve of Europeans slowly became occupied by Indonesians. The First World War exacerbated this trend, with shipping shortages preventing companies and the government from bringing young Dutch recruits to the colony. By the end of the war many urban Indonesians had experienced rapid social and economic mobility. By 1920, expatriate Europeans had by and large vacated the skilled trade jobs in the colony and the clerical and middle-level administrative positions in the public and private sectors, leaving them to Eurasians and Indonesians.

Legally the people of the Indies were classified as European, Native or Foreign Oriental. By the 1930s Eurasians were 70–80 per cent of the people legally classified as Europeans. The economic interests of 'pure' Europeans, and their social position in the colony, were very different from those of the Eurasians. They were predominantly people who saw themselves as only temporary residents in the Netherlands Indies and were mainly employed in the upper echelons of the colonial bureaucracy or as senior managers and professionals in European companies. Eurasians were by and large employed in the middle levels of the bureaucracy or in private companies, though a few notable exceptions were high- ranking officials or managers. By the 1920s, there was much less social inter-action between expatriate Europeans and Eurasians than there had been in earlier years. The 'pure' Europeans lived in the more salubrious parts of the towns and cities. The Eurasians for the most part lived in less expensive areas or adjacent to the kampung where the majority of Indonesians lived. Jobs and salaries in the bureaucracy and private companies adhered to the racial/

[6] M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c 1300* (London: Macmillan, second edition, 1993), p. 160. At six per cent the literacy rate in Java was lower than the colony average.

legal divisions in pay scales: 'pure' Europeans were paid the most, followed by Eurasians and Chinese with Indonesians paid the least.[7]

Life was insecure for most urban Indonesians. Villages continued to provide social security for circular migrants but the growing number born in the towns and cities had fewer links with the rural world. This was especially true in the big cities. Permanent urban residents had to look elsewhere for social security. Cooperatives, savings and loans groups and burial societies became part of kampung support structures. In the long Depression years of the 1930s there was also a growth in kampung-based charities providing shelter, food, clothing and medical help for the poorest of the poor. For many urban workers labour unions were important, not only protecting them against arbitrary treatment at work, and forcing higher wages and better conditions, but also providing a measure of social security.

In Europe, the sense of community created by mutual benefit societies, organised around workplaces or working-class neighbourhoods in the industrial cities, prepared the way for labour unions. Many European labour unions traced their origins directly to mutual benefit societies. Labour parties were the creations of labour unions. Colonial Java was different. Kampung-based groups were an important source of community assistance well before the emergence of labour unions and political parties. However, they were localised and, with few exceptions, did not spawn other worker organisations. In colonial Java, the great growth of mutual benefit societies occurred from the 1910s, largely due to the efforts of labour unions, nationalist political parties and modern Islamic associations.[8]

At one level, the urban areas of colonial Indonesia were European towns and cities. Europeans were in control, with the urban infrastructure designed primarily for them and the companies they represented and managed. From the towns and cities they controlled the rural heartland. The

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[7] The Eurasian experience in the Netherlands Indies is most recently discussed in Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben, *Being "Dutch" in the Indies. A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008). There is a recent biography of the prominent Eurasian E.F.E. Douwes Dekker by Paul W. van der Veur, *The lion and the gadfly. Dutch colonialism and the spirit of E.F.E. Douwes Dekker* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2006). See also, Frances Gouda, "Nyonyas on the Colonial Divide: White Women in the Dutch East Indies, 1900–1942", *Gender & History*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1993), pp. 318–342.

[8] For a recent discussion of the philanthropic activities of Muslim organisations, including their expansion in the late colonial period, see Amelia Fauzia, *Faith and the State. A History of Islamic Philanthropy in Indonesia* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

forces of social control—bureaucracy, police and army—were managed by Europeans, the political and administrative structures were in European hands and the modern sector of the economy was predominantly European-managed in the service of European capital.

At another level, however, the urban areas of late colonial Indonesia were indigenous towns and cities. Europeans ruled from their urban enclaves, delineated by pleasant garden suburbs and modern city offices, from where they ordered and natives obeyed. But most residents were Indonesians. The majority lived in increasingly over-crowded kampung. A small but growing middle class lived in areas that looked not all that much different from the European suburbs. Factories, offices, the harbours, public transport, the post office, and the lower reaches of the bureaucracy, were predominantly staffed by Indonesians. The control of urban labour and the kampung were increasingly important to the colonial government. In the eyes of most European officials and private citizens, by the 1920s 'tranquillity and order' was more likely to be threatened by urban unrest than by rural disorder.[9]

Colonial Views of Urban Workers

In 1833 Governor-General J van den Bosch wrote that, "There is nothing more pleasing to the Javanese than to be in a position where they will have to work less. This is the result of climatic conditions."[10] Almost a century later a correspondent to the journal of the printing employers association echoed the sentiment. He posed the question of whether skilled Indonesian workers were paid enough. His answer was that employers might get more from their workers if wages were a little lower:

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[9] For a more extensive discussion of urban Java in the last decades of colonial rule and the nature of the urban workforce see Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*, pp. 13–61 and "Urban Wage Labour in Colonial Java: The Growth of a Skilled Labour Force", in Michael Pinches and Salim Lakha (eds.), *Wage Labour and Social Change* (Melbourne: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1987), pp. 141–158. Nandini Gooptu has made a similar point for colonial India in *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India*, p. 12.

[10] J. van den Bosch, "Report on his activities in the Indies, 1830–1833", in C.L.M. Penders (ed.), *Indonesia: Selected Documents on Colonialism and Nationalism 1830–1942* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1977), p. 13.

> It is often said of a Native—and the same can be said of our Chinese workers—that he will not work for six days if he can get enough in three or four days to live on for a week[11]

A commonly held view among Europeans officials and employers was that Indonesian workers were lazy and lacked any real desire to improve their material life. Many Europeans were convinced that wage increases would simply cause Indonesians to work less. The Declining Welfare Report in 1912 noted that this view was widespread among employers, who asserted that Indonesian workers had few needs, certainly fewer than Chinese workers who were generally paid higher rates for exactly the same job.[12]

A belief that the material expectations of Indonesians were much lower than those of Eurasians or Chinese, let alone of expatriate Europeans, dominated the thinking of European officials and employers to the end of the colonial period. It influenced policies on wages, social welfare and industrial relations. It also affected the way in which government and employers viewed Indonesian labour unions. If Indonesian workers had few material expectations, then labour unrest and demands for higher wages must result from outside agitators. A pamphlet produced in 1949 by the re-occupying Dutch forces showed the pervasiveness of this view of Indonesians in stating "… that the Indonesians, apart from a very thin upper layer of the population, do not look ahead but live from hand to mouth." This it argued was partially determined by the climate.[13]

The colonial government saw the colony as three separate societies divided by race. Europeans/Eurasians worked in the modern economy, with social structures based on the individual and the nuclear family. The urban Chinese were also for the most part seen as individuals and as part of the modern economy, but at the same time were perceived as living in a community that retained extended family and clan-based support structures. While western-educated urban Indonesians were acknowledged to be closer to the European world, the bulk of wage-earning Indonesians were seen as members of extended families in a society with extensive informal social support structures. The urban kampung, with their communal support structures, the informal urban economy and, ultimately, the village world with which the government believed most urban Indonesians were

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[11] Article by W.A. Ruygrok in *Correspondentieblad*, 15 September 1918.

[12] *Onderzoek naar de Mindere Welvaart der Inlandsche bevolking op Java en Madoera* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1905–1920), 6d, p. 19.

[13] "Recent Communist Activity in Indonesia", p. 10, in V 31 December 1949 – Y84, NA.

still closely connected, were believed to be able to provide sufficient social and economic support in times of need.

This racial classification of colonial society led to major policy conclusions during the Depression years. First, unemployed Europeans were the priority. Second, the informal urban sector was sufficiently elastic to be able to accommodate many thousands of retrenched Indonesian urban wage-earners in lower paid work, and kampung communal structures were able to look after those who fell on hard times.[14] Third, rural Java had a limitless absorptive capacity.[15] Some officials wondered just how elastic Javanese society would eventually prove to be, but even in the depths of the Depression none argued that these limits had been reached.[16] The rural economy, because of its collective rather than individual social structures, was believed to put a high value on sharing the available work. The theory was that the collapse of urban wage-labour would result in them returning to their villages of origin and either getting casual work or being supported by their extended family and village communal structures. The villages of Java were seen as the ultimate provider of social security for Indonesian urban workers.

The State and Social Control

The towns and cities of colonial Indonesia were remarkably peaceful in the last forty years of colonial rule. There were no urban riots and no upsurge of crime linked to an urban underworld, even during the Depression. The European community in the towns and cities often complained about the prevalence of crime, the public nuisance of prostitutes on the streets at night or the danger political 'agitators' posed to 'tranquillity and order'. But the serenity of life in the late colonial towns and cities was disturbed

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[14] See, John Ingleson, "Fear of the kampung, fear of unrest: urban unemployment and colonial policy in 1930s Java", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 6 (November 2012), pp. 1633–1671.

[15] See, for example, "De bestrijding van werkloosheid" in *Java Bode*, 17 and 19 February 1932, which discussed Indonesian unemployment, arguing that despite the impact of the Depression the absorptive capacity of native society had not reached its limits.

[16] This view was seemingly universally held within the European community, as reflected not only in official reports but also in contemporary newspapers. See, "De bestrijding van werkloosheid".

more in the minds of some Europeans, paranoid about Indonesian nationalist activities, than by urban unrest.[17]

The Indies State Law of 1854 and the Criminal Code were the legal underpinnings of colonial rule. The 1854 State Law prohibited all forms of political activity, by Europeans as well as Indonesians. This was amended in the early years of the twentieth century, after the creation of municipal councils in the major towns and cities of Java, to exclude organisations and meetings exclusively directed at the election of council members.[18] It was not until 1919 that it was finally repealed, replaced by a law that recognised the right to meet and organise for political purposes, subject to the government's overriding responsibility to maintain 'tranquillity and order'. Public meetings were still subject to the prior approval of local officials and people under 18 years of age were prohibited from attending. Police and local officials had the right to attend all public meetings. In 1935, police powers were further increased to allow them to attend members' only meetings of political parties and labour unions.[19] One Indonesian newspaper editor, in discussing yet another police intervention at a political meeting, commented sarcastically that, what was not forbidden by the law, was prohibited by the police.[20]

The 1854 State Law contained a more fundamental tool for state control. This was a clause giving the Governor-General 'extraordinary powers' over and above the Criminal Code and not subject to prior Court decision or appeal. Under this clause, Dutch subjects born in the Netherlands Indies and considered a threat to the maintenance of 'tranquillity and order' could be prohibited from living in a defined area or banished to anywhere in the colony for an unlimited time. In addition, the Governor-General could banish from the colony altogether any person considered a threat to 'tranquillity and order'. This clause was used to good effect from the late nineteenth century.

The Criminal Code gave enormous power to the state and as Indonesians became increasingly organised and politically active in the twentieth century it was further amended to increase that power. As a consequence of the growth in nationalist political activity from the 1910s, the involvement

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[17] For a discussion of banditry in the areas around Batavia see Margreet Van Till, *Banditry in West Java, 1869–1942* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011).

[18] See, documents in S.L. Van de Wal, *De Opkomst van de Nationalistische Beweging in Nederlands-Indie* (Groningen: Wolters, 1967), pp. 1–37.

[19] See, *Kereta Api*, August 1937, p. 6.

[20] *Moestika*, 13 August 1932.

of Sarekat Islam in subversive activities in 1919, the growth of the Indonesian Communist Party and the prevalence of strikes in the years immediately after the First World War, broad sedition and public order clauses were added. In 1919, amendments had the effect of preventing government employees from taking part in, or even supporting, any organisation deemed to be undermining government authority. This clause was repeatedly invoked against membership of labour unions or political parties. In 1923, organising or advocating strikes was made illegal by the addition of Article 163 bis. In 1924 travel restrictions were introduced which made it far more difficult for nationalist leaders to move outside Java. Finally, in May 1926 the infamous 'hate sowing' articles were introduced which gave wide-ranging powers to the state. The major clause read:

> Whoever deliberately by speaking, writing, or pictures—even if only indirectly, by implication or veiled suggestion—praises or spreads propaganda for a disturbance of public order, for the overthrow of or insurgency against the existing government in Holland or the Netherlands Indies, will be punished by imprisonment up to six years or a fine of up to 300 guilders.[21]

The Internal Administration (Binnenlands Bestuur) was the backbone of Dutch control over the colony. Residents and Assistant Residents (Dutch), Regents and district heads (Indonesians), headed a state apparatus that prided itself on stretching into every corner of the land. In reality, this was a myth. It is doubtful how much of what really went on in villages was known to local officials, even in Java where the colonial state's control was most effective. It was much the same in the towns and cities. Life in the kampung was only vaguely understood by government officials. Ordinary people distrusted officials, tending to provide them with the information they thought they wanted to hear. As one Indonesian reporter in Batavia stated in 1933, commenting on optimistic government reports on the impact of the Depression on Indonesians:

> The wardmaster of Tanah Tinggi maintained that many unemployed answered that they had work and a good income—contrary to the truth. They did this because of fear of the police, who interrogate unemployed people and treat them as if they were vagabonds. Many need credit in these critical times, which will not be provided if their true circumstances are revealed. This provides a further reason for not acknowledging their poverty.
>
> When an official inquiry is instituted people ask themselves: 'Who is the investigator and what is his intention? If I conceal the truth what will they

[21] The translation is that in Bernhard Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 91.

be able to do to me? Nothing! And if I am honest in my replies, what wages will they give me? Will they help me? Never! It is therefore safer to conceal the true conditions.'[22]

Policing Urban Workers

The territorial army, strategically located throughout the colony, was the ultimate weapon with which the colonial state maintained its authority. The army's task was to protect the state from internal disorder rather than defend it from outside forces. In 1921, worried by the growth of the railway workers' union, the army was ordered to develop contingency plans in cooperation with the police and managers of the railway networks in case of a general strike. The contingency plans were put into good effect during the May 1923 railway strike when army units patrolled railway stations and railway workers' kampung in a show of force.[23] In 1928, fearful of new outbreaks of strikes, the government instructed the army commander to update these contingency plans.[24]

The army was the force of last resort. The police were the front-line in maintaining colonial power. The urban police force was reorganised in 1914 as a consequence of the growth of towns and cities in Java and the increasing range of tasks for which police were responsible. All Indonesian police were put into uniform and brought into a formal hierarchical structure. The police were again reorganised between 1918 and 1920 as a result of the unrest in Garut, West Java.[25] The Attorney General took over central leadership of the general police, though they remained responsible to, and were supervised by, the Internal Administration and the Department of Justice. At the local level, the police were responsible to Assistant Residents. Superintendents and Commissioners were Europeans.

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[22] *Sin Po*, 12 August 1933, quoted in Secret Mail Report 1933/1224, NA. See, John Ingleson, "Urban Java during the Depression", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (September 1988), pp. 292–309. William Frederick has written of the foreignness of the kampung to municipal and central government officials as well as to the police and of how kampung residents in Surabaya disdained all officials. See, William H Frederick, *Vision and Heat. The Making of the Indonesian Revolution* (Athens,Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989), chapter 1.

[23] See, Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*, p. 212.

[24] See, Attorney-General to Governor-General, 23 October 1928 and Governor-General to Attorney-General, 20 November 1928, V 9 October 1934 – L28, NA.

[25] See, William A. Oates, "The Afdeeling B: An Indonesian case study", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 1968), pp. 107–116.

The majority of the Indonesian town police were recruited from surrounding rural areas. It was a low status and poorly paid job. In 1921, the Attorney-General acknowledged not only that police wages were low, but that the major cities had an acute shortage of police houses and that what housing did exist was of very poor quality. Policemen were often forced to leave their families behind and live in police barracks or high priced slums. The poor wages and living conditions of Indonesian police in the major cities of Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya caused European officials to be concerned that they might become sympathetic to labour unions and nationalist political parties.[26]

With the emergence of labour unions and nationalist political parties, the colonial government wanted to ensure that it received regular information on what was happening on the ground. In 1916 it established the Political Intelligence Service (PID) as a unit within the Attorney-General's department. The PID was a separate body from the police force. It supplied reports on a regular basis to Residents as well as to Batavia. From 1927 the Attorney-General's department prepared monthly compilations of the regular day-to-day reporting received from local agents. These political intelligence reports were widely distributed within the colonial administration, to employer associations, to heads of government industries, and to major private companies.[27]

The PID had a presence in most major towns, and in the large cities had offices staffed by large numbers of permanent employees. The strength (and weakness) of the PID was the hundreds of informers retained by full-time officers. Informers were recruited in factories and workplaces, in kampung, labour unions, religious and other voluntary associations, and, of course, in political parties. It has been estimated that in the 1920s the Surabaya PID employed about 300 informers throughout the city.[28] Some of the informers were well known to their fellow workers or kampung residents and treated with a mixture of concern and contempt. The vast

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[26] See, for example, Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 24 October 1922, in Secret Mail Report 1922/1176, NA, and Attorney-General to Governor-General, 11 January 1921, in V 7 February 1922–72, NA. The most comprehensive study of the colonial police is Marieke Bloembergen, *De Geschiedenis van de Politie in Nederlands-Indie* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2009). See also, Marieke Bloembergen, "The Dirty Work of Empire: Modern Policing and Public Order in Surabaya, 1911–1919", *Indonesia*, No. 83 (April 2007), pp. 119–150.

[27] These political intelligence repors have been published. See, Harry A Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indie* (4 vols., 1982–1994).

[28] Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p. 6

majority remained anonymous, ensuring a steady flow of gossip and hearsay as well as intelligence on the 'mood' of Indonesians. The PID was frequently able to obtain reports on closed meetings of political parties and labour unions and sometimes received copies of confidential minutes before executive members themselves.[29]

The PID maintained close connections with key employers, often employing informers in the workplaces with their full knowledge. The files of one of the large private railway companies provide rare detail on one such informer. A second class clerk in the employ of the Netherlands Indies Railway Company (NIS) in Semarang was a long standing informer for the PID. In 1933, when the NIS sacked workers who were members of the railway workers' union, at the request of the PID the informer was also dismissed, because it feared his cover would be blown. However, the Company quietly let the informer know that it would re-employ him as soon as possible with full back pay. He was reinstated in January 1934, when the Company judged that its workers had forgotten about the dismissals of six months earlier.[30]

The colonial government created structures which provided a surfeit of intelligence on the Indonesian population. Some was well informed, but much was coloured by the desire of informers to keep up a steady flow of information in order to justify their retainers. Local reports were collated and interpreted by regional officers within a rigid ideological framework before transmission to Batavia.[31]

Most urban workers had little contact with the town police. Unless there was a major crisis, such as the 1923 railway strike, police patrols generally stopped at the entrances to kampung, and unless a worker had engaged in criminal activity or theft at work he came into direct contact with them only infrequently. Prostitutes, beggars or vagabonds operating outside the kampung were a different matter. They were constantly under police sur-

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[29] An article in the magazine of Perhimpunan Indonesia, the Indonesian student association in the Netherlands, argued in 1924 that "… not a meeting was held except that, a couple of hours afterwards, the authorities knew precisely what had been discussed, so that in the end one member no longer dared to trust another member." Quoted in R.E. Elson, *The Idea of Indonesia: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 76.

[30] Chairman of the Executive Committee to Chairman of the Board of Directors, Semarang, 10 October 1933, Personal no. 109, NIS 274, NA.

[31] The reliability of police surveillance and informers is discussed in Takashi Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground", *Indonesia*, No. 63 (April 1997), pp. 1–46.

veillance and often ended up being arrested, fined and jailed.[32] Taxi drivers were another group in frequent, and unwelcome, contact with the police, accusing them of rudeness and imposing fines for the most trivial offences.

Indonesians argued that during the Depression years the police were much harsher towards the urban poor and unemployed. It is hard to get more than circumstantial evidence, but in 1933 the Director of Justice acknowledged that people in the kampung were reluctant to admit that they were unemployed because the unemployed were the first suspects whenever there were robberies. He quoted an example of one kampung where a man had been held by police for three days simply because he had no visible means of support yet was well dressed. Similar occurrences, he believed, happened every day.[33]

Kampung had their own neighbourhood protection schemes, with able-bodied men rostered for night duty at the guard posts on entrances from the main roads. Outsiders were prevented from entering and watch was kept for potential thieves who might sneak into the kampung under cover of darkness. In kampung owned by government industries or private companies, neighbourhood watch schemes were supplemented by company guards, who served not only to protect residents' lives and property but also as a symbol of the company presence.[34]

Workplace Organisation and Discipline

Workplaces in colonial Indonesia were organised along ethnic lines. The growth of the commercial and industrial sectors of the urban economy after 1870, together with the expansion of educational opportunities for Indonesians, resulted in a constant reclassification of employment categories in the colony. As the general schools and the trade schools produced an increasing flow of graduates, jobs previously the preserve of Europeans or Eurasians were assigned to Indonesians, and in the process wages were lowered. While there were some areas of urban employment where people from different racial groups did the same job, in general, once Indonesians

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[32] See, Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground", pp. 1–46.

[33] Director of Justice to Governor-General, enclosed in Secret Mail Report 1933/1224, NA.

[34] For a discussion of guardhouses in contemporary Indonesia, which also reflects on their colonial antecedents, see Abidin Kusno, "Guardian of Memories: *Gardu* in Urban Java", *Indonesia*, No. 81 (April 2006), pp. 95–149.

did work previously the preserve of Chinese, Eurasians or Europeans, then the earlier group moved elsewhere.

By the 1910s, some of the larger employers were moving to direct recruitment of skilled labour and towards formal apprenticeships and industry training of Indonesian recruits. However, most workers were recruited directly by foremen. In the factories, workshops and harbours they were trusted workers of long-standing. When seeking workers they chose from the surfeit of people who turned up each day at workplace gates. Often they looked to their home village or region for workers. Sometimes they personally visited their home region seeking out workers, but more often they seem to have established informal linkages, sometimes sustained at major holidays and festival times when they made brief visits. Foremen were powerful men with considerable patronage at their disposal.

Employers were happy to allow this recruitment system to operate because it supplied them with a reliable labour force under the personal control of a foreman. The foreman was the link between European management and Indonesian workers, with little direct communication between the two. The language barrier was a major problem. Few European managers spoke other than basic Malay and certainly not Javanese, Madurese or the other regional languages which were the mother tongues of their workers. As the modern sector of the economy expanded in the twentieth century, so the number of young Dutchmen brought out to manage the system increased considerably. Old European hands frequently lamented that younger Europeans were more brash and less inclined to be bothered about understanding their native workforce. The increased speed of communication between Europe and the Indies enabled more frequent home leave and closer contact with affairs at home. The presence of European wives and families, together with the closed worlds of European clubs, all helped insulate European managers and supervisors from Indonesian society.

The foreman was, then, the key worker in the European-owned companies. It was the foreman who was in contact with workers, not only passing on instructions from above but also hearing grievances first-hand and acting as a channel from workers to European managements. The foreman recruited his workers in the first place, extracting a commission for his service, and often arranged housing as well. The foreman often decided promotions or dismissals and whether or not fines would be imposed for misdemeanours. It was the foreman who usually decided when a worker could take holidays and rest days, or whether he could work overtime. The foreman maintained discipline, allocated jobs and generally controlled the

lives of workers. As a result of the post First World War strikes waves, employers realised a key to maintaining control over their Indonesian workers was to ensure that their foremen were on side.

The large number of day-wage labourers employed by the railways, the harbours, the factories, the warehouses and the municipal councils gave enormous power to those deciding who got work. At the State Railways Yogyakarta station in 1931 causal labourers had to pay the foreman 25 cents each morning or afternoon for the right to carry passengers' luggage to and from the trains.[35] Workers employed on the Surabaya docks in 1938 were paid 19 cents a day, from which the foreman who paid them deduced four cents.[36] The Depression years made life even worse for day-wage labourers. Reporting on the Cirebon harbour in 1932, a local official lamented that "If now and then there is work to be found, the foremen give it to people who will give them a tip, so that the poorest labourers have even less chance to find work."[37]

Clerks who registered workers as employees also used their position for personal again. At the British American Tobacco Company factory in Cirebon, on the north coast of Java, for example, in 1933 a labourer had to pay two guilders to a clerk to get a job and another five cents a week to keep it. These were people paid less than one guilder a week.[38] Another example is from the Negresco cigarette factory at Mataram, Central Java. In 1933 it employed around 1,000 people, around 600 of whom were young women who had to pay two guilders and fifty cents to the employer as a bond when they started work. It was supposed to be refunded at 25 cents a week or in full if they left work, but often it was not.[39] Many taxi and bus companies outsourced their labour recruitment to agents who demanded a fee from workers.[40] One of the first requests of a union for harbour and trading company workers in Cilacap, in 1934, was that laws be introduced to protect workers from having their wages clipped by foremen and requiring all wages to be paid directly to workers.[41]

Company housing was a further means of social control. Striking workers in the sugar factories and the railways in the early 1920s were forced to vacate houses rented from the companies. Nurses who lived in hospital-

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35 *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 23 January 1931.

36 *Soeara Oemoem*, 6 January 1938.

37 See, the report by the Labour Office official, Raden Iskandar, p. 3, enclosed in Director of Justice to Governor-General, 25 November 1932, Secret Mail Report 1932/1723, NA.

38 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 23 May 1931.

39 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 9 June 1933.

40 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 23 May 1931.

41 "Nasib kaoem boeroeh ketjil", *Soeara Oemoem*, 20 January 1939.

provided housing and who went on strike in the 1920s were rendered homeless. Faced with 'passive resistance' from some of its Indonesian workers in 1933, the Netherlands Indies Railway Company forcible removed from their houses those who refused to resign from the union. The Unikampung at the Batavian harbour, widely regarded as model housing for lower paid workers, was also seen as a tool for labour control. The threat of being turned out of their homes was a powerful weapon, wielded to good effect by private companies and state-owned enterprises.

Labour was very mobile in late colonial Java. The expansion of the railway networks from the 1870s made it much easier for rural people to seek casual or seasonal work in towns and cities. Workers were also mobile between employers. They had no choice, as most were employed as monthly- or day-wage earners, with employers easily able to adjust the number of people they employed. Only the more skilled workers were in any sense long-term employees. This was as true for government industries as it was for private companies.

While employers relished the surfeit of labour, because it kept wages low and enabled them to employ and dismiss workers at will, they were concerned that the mobility of workers weakened their control over them. Controlling 'undesirable' native workers was a constant concern of both state and private employers. 'Undesirables' included people who had engaged in fraud in the workplace or who had a criminal record, but also anyone who had been a member of the communist party, or one of the unions closely associated with it, or had been on strike or was an advocate for unions in the workplace. An important tool for managing these 'undesirable' workers was the new fingerprinting technology and identity cards which had both a fingerprint and a photograph.

The Department of Justice established a fingerprinting bureau in 1914, primarily for Indonesians who had been convicted of major crimes. The State Railways and the Post Office were early adopters of fingerprinting as a way of controlling Indonesian workers, though they did not do so on a systematic basis until the late 1920s. In 1920 the Department of Justice fingerprinting bureau was re-organised into the Central Fingerprinting Bureau, responsible for keeping fingerprint files on workers in all government departments and industries as well as maintaining the criminal fingerprint file. By 1929 the Central Fingerprinting Bureau was handling about 30,000 sets of fingerprints annually.[42]

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[42] See, "Afdeeling Dactyloscopie", October 1929, in a file "Dactyloscopies 1927–1932", in Binnenlands Bestuur Collection 3555, ANRI.

The new fingerprinting technology was also adopted by private employers. In the wake of the strikes in the sugar factories, in 1919 the Sugar Syndicate established a fingerprinting bureau in Surabaya. Other Surabaya-based employers, including engineering companies, the shipping company Rotterdam Lloyd and the Surabaya Naval Base quickly joined.[43] By 1929 the Sugar Syndicate fingerprinting bureau held files on around 160,000 workers. Each registered worker when changing jobs was given a small booklet with details of previous employment. Employers demanded the booklet from people seeking work. It was then sent with a new fingerprint to the fingerprinting bureau for checking. Companies were intent on weeding out workers who had been involved in unrest or strikes, had been dismissed by previous employers for poor work, theft or disruption in the workplace or who had not repaid wages paid in advance.[44] Other industry groups in Batavia and Bandung followed the lead from Surabaya. In 1933, the Central Fingerprinting Bureau combined with the fingerprinting bureau of the Java Sugar Employers and in 1936 with the fingerprinting office of the South and West Sumatra Syndicate to form one large centralised fingerprinting bureau.[45]

Company-owned housing, centralised fingerprinting bureaus, the informal power of foremen and the formal power of police and local officials were all important tools for managing urban workers. So too was an extensive fine system used by most employers. Fines were levied for a range of offences. In the Post Office, for example, a mail sorter could be fined for incorrectly sorting a letter or a postman for delivering a letter to the wrong address. Some supervisors were notorious for their tough approach, and more than one dispute was triggered by their arbitrary actions. The ultimate weapon was the almost unfettered power of dismissal. There were rules for the public sector, or at least for the minority of permanent employees. Monthly- and day-wage workers were at the mercy of local foremen and managers at railway stations, post offices, pawnshops or workplaces. There were few legal restraints on private employers, at least until the Depression

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[43] The Surabaya Naval Base used the Bureau for all of its 4,500 monthly- and day-wage Indonesian and Chinese workers. See, Head of Department 7, Department of Marine to Department of Justice 24 April 1929, in a file "Dactyloscopies 1927–1932", in Binnenlands Bestuur Collection 3555, ANRI.

[44] There is a detailed report on the Surabaya fingerprinting bureau in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 20 October 1929.

[45] See, *Regeerings Almanak 1941*, part 1, p. 86 and annual reports in the *Koloniaal Verslag* and the *Indische Verslag*.

when the government, worried about unrest that might be caused by sudden huge job losses, required a minimum notice period or wages in lieu.

The State and Industrial Laws

As the urban economy became more important from the 1870s, the colonial government was faced with new problems of monitoring health and safety in the emerging factories and workshops and ensuring reasonable standards of wages and conditions for workers. Prime responsibility lay with the Internal Administration and more particularly with local Residents. When disputes occurred between workers and European managers, local Residents or Assistant Residents were quickly involved as mediators. Residents were always focused on maintaining 'tranquillity and order', but many also prided themselves on being protectors of native interests. After assessing the causes of labour disputes they sometimes pressured European managers to address underlying causes, such as wage grievances or resentment at arbitrary treatment by supervisors.

The colonial government came under growing pressure from labour unions, European as well as Indonesian, to take a more interventionist approach to the regulation of the formal economy, and especially to the protection of wage earners. The creation in 1918 of the colonial advisory council, the Volksraad, provided a platform for European and Indonesian members to argue for improved social laws. Indeed, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, few other issues received as much attention from Volksraad members. The government was repeatedly urged to recognise the changes taking place in the economy by creating a regulatory system that brought working conditions and workers' rights more into line with the laws that prevailed in the Netherlands itself.

It was not until 1919 that oversight of workers in the modern sector of the urban economy became the sole responsibility of a designated body in Batavia. In February of that year a Labour Commission was established to monitor labour conditions and to investigate specific issues as instructed by the Governor-General. Labour unrest had increased significantly in 1918, largely as a consequence of the impact of post-war inflation and a temporary labour shortage in the major cities, and the Indonesian members of the newly created Volksraad had been instrumental in demanding that the colonial government pay more attention to the social and economic conditions of urban workers.

As well as arguing for the establishment of a legal minimum wage for Indonesians, the Labour Commission also urged the establishment of a labour inspectorate for Java and Madura, modelled on the existing Labour Inspectorate for the Outer Islands in the Department of Justice, which had as one of its primary tasks monitoring wages and working conditions of contract labourers in the Sumatran plantations and mines. At the end of 1921, the Commission was transformed into a Labour Office.

The Labour Office was generally a liberal voice within an increasingly conservative colonial government.[46] It was staffed by people who saw one of their roles as being to exert pressure on European employers to deal fairly with Indonesian workers. It became a major source of information and advice to the government for the management of urban labour and contract labour in the Outer Islands. It collected statistical information on the workforces in factories and workshops, on labour union membership and on labour disputes, and its officers carried out regular health and safety inspections under the colony's Factories Act. When major strikes occurred it sent investigators into the factories and kampung to interview workers and prepare detailed reports for Batavia. In the 1930s it produced a series of valuable reports on unemployment in Indonesia, on the batik industry, on the cigarette industry at Malang and on the plantation industry in Java. These industry reports were scathing in their criticism of wages and working conditions and were used by the colonial government to pressure the industries to put their houses in order.[47]

Shortly after the establishment of the Labour Office, the post-war recession confronted the colony with European unemployment for the first time. The government responded in April 1922 by creating Labour Bureaus in Bandung and Batavia. A third Labour Bureau was established in Surabaya in 1925 and a fourth in Yogyakarta in 1927. The Labour Bureaus were charged with registering the unemployed—initially Europeans but quickly also

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[46] For example, in February 1932 the Labour Office persuaded the government to regulate the minimum notice that an employer was required to provide to an employee to equivalent to one month's wages, which was to be lengthened by an additional month for each year of service to a maximum of three months. See, Besluit No. 25, 19 February 1932 in Mail Report 1932/286, NA.

[47] See, P. de Kat Angelino, *Verslag betreffende eene door den inspecteur bij het Kantoor van Arbeid, P. de Kat Angelino op de Vorstenlandsche tabaksondernemingen gehouden enquete* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1929), P. de Kat Angelino, *Rapport betreffende eene gehouden enquete naar de arbeidstoestanden in de batikkerijen op Java en Madoera* (Weltevreden: Landsdrukkerij, 3 vols., 1930–1), B. Reijden, *Rapport betreffende eene gehouden enquete naar de arbeidstoestanden in de industrie van strootjes en inheemsche sigaretten op Java* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 3 vols., 1934–6).

Indonesians who were high school graduates (so-called 'chief workers')—and liaising with employers to match the unemployed to jobs.[48] With the onset of the Depression the number of Labour Bureaus was expanded to twenty, all but two in towns and cities in Java.[49] In 1931 the Labour Office created a Central Unemployment Bureau to bring the local bureaus more closely under its supervision. The Labour Bureaus registered the urban unemployed and tried to assist them to obtain work. The Central Unemployment Bureau administered government funds and audited funds raised by local committees.[50]

The Labour Office was responsible for monitoring child and female labour to ensure compliance with colonial laws, which in the 1920s and 1930s were tightened in response not only to pressure from Indonesian political and union leaders but also in response to pressure from the International Labour Office on the Netherlands government to apply international agreements to its colonies. It was also responsible for monitoring and organising free emigration from overcrowded areas of Central and East Java to the Outer Islands. It constantly monitored the Indonesian language press, publishing monthly press surveys which summarised discussion on labour matters for government departments in Batavia. During the Depression years it also kept a close watch on contract labourers who returned to Java, investigating their living and working conditions and the attitudes of local people to them.

The Idea of a Minimum Wage

As the First World War entered its final year the European community in the Indies felt extremely vulnerable. Isolated from the motherland, it feared that the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia would spread to Western Europe and worried about the political future of the Netherlands itself. In the Indies, nationalists were increasingly vociferous in demanding political reform in return for continued support of the colonial government. In this charged atmosphere, Governor-General Van Limburg Stirum announced a series of reforms in November 1918 designed to placate nationalists by

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48 For a discussion of the establishment of the Labour Bureaus see *Economische Weekblad*, 26 May 1933.

49 *Statistical Pocketbook of Indonesia 1941*, Table 99, p. 68.

50 I have discussed the Labour Bureaus and the Central Unemployment Committee in "Fear of the kampung, fear of unrest".

meeting some of their demands. The so-called 'November promises' included greater Indonesian participation in the government of the colony, a review of the working conditions of Indonesians and of labour relations and greater legal protection for the more vulnerable Indonesian workers.[51]

One outcome of the 'November promises' was the establishment in 1919 of a commission to inquire into the feasibility of establishing a minimum wage on Java. Local officials had been warning for some time that wages were not keeping pace with inflation. They had been instrumental in persuading the sugar industry in the immediate post-war years to meet workers' demands for improved wages. The primary cause of the post-war strike waves in the cities and the sugar areas of Java were demands for higher wages. The link between worker militancy and falling real wages was one increasingly made by Indonesian labour leaders, political leaders, the Indonesian press and Indonesian members of the Volksraad, as well as by government officials and sections of the European press.

The Commission addressed fundamental assumptions underpinning the colonial relationship.[52] Despite the rhetoric of the Ethical Policy, the colonial economy was based on exploitation of cheap native labour by foreign capital, backed by the coercive power of the colonial state. The Commission posed challenging questions. What were the basic needs of the increasing number of Indonesian families dependent on wage labour? Were existing wages sufficient to meet these needs? Should the forces of supply and demand determine wages and, if they did, could they deliver a reasonable outcome? Was there a moral imperative for the state to establish a floor?

There was a majority and a minority report. Both recommended the establishment of a legal minimum wage but differed significantly on how it should be calculated. This reflected two quite different views about Indonesian society. The majority report was based on two assumptions. First, a minimum wage had to be considerably less than the 'ideal' wage because it needed to take account of 'practical economics'. It believed that colonial industries could not afford the 'ideal'. Second, any sudden increase in wages arising from the creation of a minimum wage would lead to workers'

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[51] For a recent discussion see Kees van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War 1914–1918* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), especially pp. x and 579–612.

[52] *Verslag van de Commissie Betreffende de Wettelijke Vaststelling van Minimumloonen voor Werknemers op Java en Madoera* (Batavia: 1920).

wasting the money. It had a low view of the capacity of workers, especially poor ones, to cope with a sudden increase in wages:

> Even in a situation of deep poverty, a disproportionate increase in income will usually not be spent mainly on food and housing, and so on, but instead will frequently lead to absenteeism, drunkenness, gambling, extravagance etc.[53]

It acknowledged that real wages for Indonesians had declined since 1905, with the decline accelerating under the impact of post-war inflation. While it recognised that family income was the measure of prosperity in Indonesian society, it rejected the concept of a family minimum wage because it would lead to at least a three or fourfold increase in wages, which would cause enormous problems for colonial industries. Instead it recommended separate minimum daily rates for men, women and children, set annually on a district-by-district basis. The minimum daily wage for men should cover the necessities of life, as determined by local costs and should commence at 50 cents. The minimum wage for women should be 80 per cent of that for men, for children between 12 and 16 years of age 60 per cent, and for children under 12 years of age 40 per cent. It assumed a 10-hour day, including all meals and rest breaks, and six continuous days of work, followed by a full day of rest. In order to protect local industry, it recommended that the increased wages be phased in with increases of two and a half cents each month until the minimum wages were met.

The minority report took a more radical approach.[54] It described the majority position as essentially immoral because, while acknowledging the total inadequacy of Indonesian wages, it proposed only partial rectification. The government, it argued, had a duty to ensure a legally enforceable minimum wage adequate for the basic needs of an Indonesian family. The minority were convinced that the evidence before the Commission clearly showed systematic malnourishment among Indonesian workers in Java. They referred especially to the fact that the cost of feeding an Indonesian adult in a Batavian jail was 42 cents per day and that this was regarded by jail authorities as the minimum necessary to provide basic nutritional needs. Using this data they argued that in Batavia a family of a man, wife and two children would be undernourished if they did not have between one guilder and 25 cents and one guilder and 50 cents a day for food alone,

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[53] Ibid., pp. 16–17.

[54] "Nota van de Leden der Arbeidscommissie A. Muhlenfeld, W.A. Th. Burger en Raden Abikoesno Tjokrosoejoso", Ibid., pp. 33–40.

or between one guilder and 40 cents and one guilder and 75 cents in total. The harsh reality was that Indonesian workers in Batavia often earned no more than 30–40 cents a day. Even if these wages were doubled to allow for the financial contributions of a wife and children, it was clear that the family would only have about half of what it needed for a minimum standard of living. In its view, the market would never rectify this problem because of the abundance of available labour. Government intervention was essential.[55]

The political economy of the colony was dominated by the interests of the huge plantations on Java and Sumatra and by the emerging oil industry. They wanted the plentiful supply of cheap labour to continue indefinitely, with as few regulatory restrictions as possible. They were not interested in the development of the economy beyond the protection of their highly profitable industries.[56] As the chairman of the Sugar Syndicate bluntly stated in 1928, the primary responsibility of industry in the colony was to make a profit, not to look after the interests of the Javanese.[57] The Sugar Syndicate vigorously rejected a minimum wage on the grounds that it was economically unrealistic in Indonesian conditions. It resorted to the old argument that if native wages were increased they would simply reduce the number of hours worked and warned that large capital could decide to move elsewhere if a minimum wage was legislated.[58] Most senior government officials were also opposed to the recommendations, on the grounds that Indonesian society was very different from that of Europe and that a minimum wages was impossible to implement, monitor and enforce. In the face of strong opposition from plantation interests, the sugar industry, employer associations and officials, the Governor-General shelved the recommendations.[59]

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[55] Ironically, one consequence of the report comparing the average wage of labourers with the cost of feeding a prisoner was a reduction in jail rations. See, A.M.P.A. Scheltema, "Zijn Minimuum loonen voor Java en Madoera nu Urgenter dan in 1921?"; *Koloniale Studien*, Vol. 20, N03 (1935), p. 93.

[56] For a discussion of the intractable position of the plantation interests and the failure of the commission established to promote the development of industry in the Indies see Alexander Gordon, "The Necessary But Impossible Task. The Promotion of Industry and the Factory Commission in the Netherlands East Indies 1920–1926", unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nijmegen, 2009.

[57] Speech of Mr H. Jelgerhuis Swilders, chairman of the Java Sugar Syndicate, to the 10th Sugar Congress in Surabaya in April 1928 reported in Beniso circular to members, B 1139–6, 25 May 1928, in NHM Archives, Box 6771, NA.

[58] Daily executive of the General Syndicate of Sugar Factories in the Netherlands Indies, Surabaya, 1 June 1921, enclosed in Secret Mail Report 1921/614, NA.

[59] Even *De Vakbeweging*, the voice of European unions generally sympathetic to Indonesian workers, argued against the introduction of a minimum wage, concluding that:

Indonesian labour unions attacked the colonial government for yet again caving in to the interests of European capital in order to ensure high profits from low wages. In their view a minimum wage was enforceable, at least on the relatively small number of major employers in the colony. They realised, though, that the point was not that a minimum wage could not be introduced but that it was against the interests of European plantations and other large European employers.

Indonesian labour unions were aware of the history of minimum wage campaigns in western countries and how long it had taken in so many of them. They were also well aware that employers had never been supportive, and that in most cases a minimum wage was only achieved when labour unions and labour parties were able to use the pressure of electoral politics. A legally enforceable minimum wage remained a fundamental demand of labour unions throughout the 1920s and 1930s. When Indonesians had a majority of the seats in municipal councils in the 1930s some councils established a minimum wage for their own employees. The leader of the National Fraction in the Volksraad, Husni Thamrin, kept up the pressure on the government. In 1938 the government responded in a minimalist way by sending a circular to private employers drawing their attention to the wages of labourers.[60] This was well short of a legislated minimum wage. One of the earliest pieces of labour legislation enacted by an independent Indonesia established a minimum wage.

Reviewing the Criminal Code

Indonesian labour union leaders were fierce critics of the repressive laws added to the Criminal Code between 1923 and 1926 (Articles 153 bis and ter and 161 bis). Year after year, Indonesian members of the Volksraad, led by Suroso, Thamrin, Sutadi, Kusumo Utoyo and Ratu Langie, supported by some of the non-official Europeans, urged the government to repeal the

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"It is possible to increase the labour output of an individual native, to a limited extent, but The Native, as a type, represents a society whose development is far behind that of our West European society and, generally, he provides no more labour than his society demands of him. Increasing an average individual's labour efficiency will be achieved by increasing the norms of his society. And this is a process than will take many years to achieve. There is not the slightest reason to expect that a labourer who suddenly receives a higher than normal wage will respond by increasing his labour output. This cannot be achieved through establishing a minimum wage."

See, "Over Minimuum-loonen", *De Vakbeweging*, 10 October 1925.

60 See, *Soeara Oemoem*, 25 January 1939.

laws. Their strongest objections were to the vagueness of the wording, arbitrary application by police and local officials, and the restrictions they imposed on freedom of speech, not just because editors were jailed and newspapers banned, but because it resulted in self-censorship from fear of breaching the laws. In their view, the laws stunted the economic and political development of Indonesia by limiting the space for political parties and labour unions to create a strong civil society. They were not opposed to laws against the use of violence—all condemned the communist uprisings—but they repeatedly contrasted the Indies with India and the Philippines, where far less restrictive laws enabled moderate political parties and labour unions to establish deep roots into their societies.

In August 1929, three leading nationalist members of the Volksraad, Thamrin, Suroso and Sutadi, introduced a motion calling on the government to abolish the three clauses on the grounds that they were a severe restriction on the growth of the Indonesian political and labour movements. A heated debate ensued, but once again the government held its ground. [61] A few months later, in December 1929, these laws were used to arrest Sukarno and three other central leaders of the PNI, raid PNI offices and its leaders' homes and take hundreds of PNI members into preventive detention for interrogation. This set off another fierce attack on the government by Indonesian, and some European, members of the Volksraad with renewed demands for the repeal of the offending clauses.[62]

Governor-General De Graeff had only reluctantly acceded to the arrest of PNI leaders, on advice from his Attorney-General and other conservative senior officials that an outbreak of unrest was imminent. The failure of the raids and interrogations to sustain this claim caused De Graeff to be more sensitive than usual to the trenchant criticism from Indonesian members of the Volksraad of the repressive articles in the Criminal Code. While many

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[61] During the Volksraad debate Sutadi argued that "… if these articles did not exist, we would be much freer in our speeches and our writings because we would no longer fear them hanging over our heads." He described the laws as "… constituting a serious threat to freedom of expression and the healthy development of the native movement." In the same debate Ratu Langie argued, "Article 161 bis is one-sided. It prohibits employees from using the strike weapon on the grounds that economic order might be disturbed. However, are there any limits, backed by sanctions, on employers who disturb economic order? .... It is clear to me, that according to Indies law, employers who disturb the economic order by shutting down their operations and sending employees home are not liable to any punishment." *Volksraad Handelingen*, 1929–1930, pp. 133 and 241, reproduced in *Verslag van de Commissie voor de Herziening van de Artikelen 153 bis en ter en 161 bis van het Wetboek van Strafrecht*. (Batavia: 1931), pp. 8 and 23.

[62] Ingleson, *Road to Exile*, pp. 108–117.

Indonesian nationalists had supported tough action against the PKI, repression of the PNI was a very different matter. In March 1930, De Graeff moved to head off the attacks in the Volksraad by establishing a Commission to review the three contested articles in the Criminal Code. The Commission was chaired by J.M.J. Schepper, a professor at the Law School in Batavia. Among its fourteen members were nine members of the Volksraad, including four of the strongest critics, Suroso, Thamrin, Kusumo Utoyo and Ratu Langie.

The Commission published its report in June 1931.[63] It acknowledged the validity of six major arguments against the Articles: their wording was far too vague, they limited freedom of speech, they provided no legal certainty, they gave arbitrary power to police and local officials, they allowed preventive detention to be used too often, and they were unnecessary because other articles in the Criminal Code prohibited violent activity or activity which sought to overthrow the state. The Commission's terms of reference probably prohibited it recommending the total repeal of the three Articles, even if it wished to do so, and anyway its dominance by government officials and conservative members of the Volksraad ruled that out. However, it did recommend rewriting the Articles to limit their scope. Its more far-reaching recommendations included a ban on strikes in vital industries (such as transport, communications, electricity and gas production, and hospitals) compensated by the creation of an arbitration system. With the exception of vital industries it recommended that while politically motivated strikes should continue to be prohibited, economic strikes should be permitted. This should be regulated by a Central Council with representatives of employers and employees. Finally, in order to ensure uniformity in the application of the laws, it recommended that jurisdiction be moved from the local courts to the Court of Justice.[64]

Kusumo Utoyo, Thamrin and Suroso submitted a minority report in which they reiterated their view that Articles 153 bis and ter and 161 bis should be repealed. Their argument summed up the view of most Indonesian labour union leaders:

> The labour movement in Europe has taught us that the initiative to take measures to improve the social conditions of the working class lies not with

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[63] *Verslag van de Commissie voor de Herziening van de Artikelen 153 bis en ter en 161 bis van het Wetboek van Strafrecht*.

[64] Ibid., pp. 1–33.

> the state or with employers but with workers themselves. This is also the case in this country.[65]

They argued that while unions were banned from involvement in strikes, there were no limitations on the actions of employers. The laws, even if re-drafted as recommended by the Commission, would still unfairly limit the ability of unions to get better wages and conditions. They could agree to a ban on strikes in 'vital industries' only if proper social laws were in place, such as a minimum daily wage, maximum hours of work, and age and accident pensions. They summed up their position:

> There is the possibility that an employer who knows that strikes are banned in vital industries will argue that the profitability of his industry makes it impossible for him to meet workers' demands. In this case, the employer may provoke employees into a strike.
>
> Also, there is the possibility that an employer will threaten to close his industry in order to force workers to accept lower wages.
>
> In order to limit the ability of employers to provoke strikes, laws should be introduced whereby an employer found guilty of provoking a strike or labour conflict would be punished.[66]

The Indonesian writers of the minority report were aware that labour union leaders in the colony were not advocating strikes. Rather, the legal prohibition on strikes, in conjunction with the absence of an arbitration system or laws requiring employers to recognise unions, gave too much power to employers. They understood the history of the labour movement in Europe. Freedom of association and freedom of the press together with the legal right to strike were essential to force employers to take unions seriously.

It is unlikely that the Indonesian writers of the minority report expected their views to prevail. The Attorney-General rejected even the very modest proposals of the majority, stating that his main objection was the distinction made between pure economic and pure political strikes, and between strikes in vital industries and those in non-vital industries. In a colony, he argued, there could never be a pure economic strike:

> They have lost sight of the fact that striking (a withdrawal of labour 'en masse') is simply foreign to the nature of native employees, and that, when-

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[65] Ibid., Appendix 7. Minority Report of Kusumo Utoyo, Thamrin and Suroso, p. 83.
[66] Ibid., Appendix 7. Minority Report of Kusumo Utoyo, Thamrin and Suroso, p. 86.

> ever this occurs, there is absolutely no doubt that there is a tendentious political background to it[67]

In September 1931, De Graeff retired as Governor-General and was replaced by Jonkheer Mr B.C.D De Jonge. De Jonge was a very different person, intolerant of any criticism, let alone opposition, and convinced that tough love was the best way to handle the natives. Schepper had published a pamphlet in 1930 in which he argued that the conviction of the PNI leaders was an affront to the high principles and long traditions of Dutch law.[68] De Jonge was not amused. In his memoirs he described the pamphlet as "… an impertinent brochure … not a pure legal argument in a legal association journal, but a political pamphlet"[69] There was no chance of De Jonge accepting the Schepper Commission recommendations. The result was increasingly frustrated Indonesian nationalists throughout the 1930s and, as we shall see, strong public criticism not only from Indonesian union leaders but also from leaders of European unions.

The British in India and the Americans in the Philippines made changes to industrial laws in the twentieth century, which had the effect of assisting the development of labour unions. They were decades of lost opportunities in Indonesia. Despite the rhetoric of wanting to see the growth of 'healthy' labour unions for Indonesian workers, the colonial government baulked at every proposal for major reform to the industrial laws or the Criminal Code. Changes were introduced reluctantly and only after considerable pressure from Indonesian and European labour unions. European and Indonesian unions had many fundamental differences but they were in agreement on the urgent need for reforms to the industrial laws and the Criminal Code.

The refusal of the colonial government to make significant reforms reflected its focus on containing Indonesian labour unions and preventing them from creating deep linkages into the workplaces and the kampung. Those who ruled the Indies in the 1930s believed that they would continue to do so for many decades to come—for another 300 years, in the infamous words of Governor-General De Jonge in 1935.[70] There was no urgency to

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[67] Attorney-General to Governor-General, 26 June 1933, Secret Mail Report 1933/1040, NA.

[68] J.M.J. Schepper, *Het Vonnis in de PNI-Zaak* (Batavia: 1930).

[69] S.L. van der Wal (ed.), *Herinneringen van Jhr Mr. B.C.de Jonge* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhof, 1968), p. 137.

[70] Susan Abeyasekere, "Relations between the Indonesian Cooperating Nationalists and the Dutch, 1935–1942", Unpublished Phd thesis, Monash University, 1972, p. 66, quoting

modernise industrial laws to bring them more into line with those in the Netherlands. It doggedly held to the view that Indonesian workers were essentially different from European workers and that Indonesian social structures were such that they did not need state provided social security.

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the *Deli Courant*, 4 April 1936.

CHAPTER TWO

STRUCTURES, LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

The colonial labour movement was very diverse. Well-established unions for public sector workers contrasted with more volatile unions for private sector workers. Within the public sector there were a few large, well-organised and financially strong unions which dominated the labour movement and a greater number of smaller unions for specific occupational groups. Despite this diversity, and especially the gulf between those in the public and those in the private sector, unions faced many similar issues in trying to create structures and programs that would attract and retain urban workers. Among these issues were: effective branch and central leadership; race, class and gender divisions; and the balance between focussing on industrial issues and providing social security for members. If the problems they faced were similar so too were many of the solutions, as unions struggled to rebuild a strong labour movement with deep linkages into urban workplaces and kampung.

The Political Context

The Indonesian Community Party's resort to rebellion at the end of 1926 and the beginning of 1927 failed dismally. The party was banned and thousands of members were jailed or exiled to Boven Digul, the specially created prison camp in West Irian. Most of the unions for private sector workers in the early 1920s had been created by the PKI. They too were banned and hundreds of their members interrogated by police or employers. Many were exiled to Boven Digul and many others jailed.

The colonial state's ruthless destruction of the PKI changed the political landscape. Sarekat Islam, with a platform based on an Islamic as well as a national identity, had been a fierce competitor but by the mid 1920s was a fading force never to recover its former strength.[1] More conservative groups such as Budi Utomo, the first nationalist political party founded in 1908,

[1] On Sarekat Islam see: Ruth T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion*, Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973)

had small constituences, as did a number of regional parties.[2] None had the capacity to take over the leadership of the nationalist movement. This political vacuum was filled in the middle of 1927 by the creation of a new nationalist party, Perserikatan Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Association—PNI). With the notable exception of Sukarno, who was a student at the Bandung Technical Institute, leadership came largely from young men recently returned from university study in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands they had been members of the Indonesian students' association, Perhimpunan Indonesia, and had kept a close eye on events at home while developing their ideas on new directions for the nationalist movement.[3] At its peak the PNI had about 10,000 members, of whom nearly ninety per cent lived in the three major Java cities of Batavia, Bandung and Surabaya. The vast majority were school teachers, government employees, clerks and tradesmen, with a sprinkling of self-employed at the higher echelons.[4] The PNI refused to accept appointments to the Volksraad, or to the Provincial Councils in Java, and refused also to take part in the very restricted elections for Municipal Councils.

The PNI had only a short life. In December 1929 many of its key leaders were arrested, including Sukarno whose energy and oratory skills had played a major role in its success.[5] The party was effectively banned. Despite its short life it was remarkably successful in popularising the idea of an independent Indonesia as a united and secular state. The emotional appeal of the idea of Indonesia was clearly on display at the 1928 Youth Congress where hundreds of young men and women made a public pledge to one fatherland, one nation and one language. The red and white 'national' flag was solemnly raised while the 'national' anthem, the Indonesia Raya, was sung for the first time.[6]

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and A.P.E. Korver, *Sarekat Islam 1912–1916* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1982).

[2] On Budi Utomo see Akira Nagazumi, *The Dawn of Indonesian Nationalism. The Early Years of the Budi Utomo, 1908–1918* (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1972).

[3] On Perhimpunan Indonesia see, John Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia and the Indonesian Nationalist Movement 1923–1928* (Melbourne: Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, 1975) and Harry A. Poeze, *In Het Land van de Overheerser. Indonesiers in Nederland 1600–1950* (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1986), pp. 157–239.

[4] Ingleson, *Road to Exile*, p. 106.

[5] For biographies of Sukarno see John D. Legge, *Sukarno, A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), Bernhard Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), and Bob Hering, *Soekarno. Founding Father of Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002).

[6] See, Keith Foulcher, "*Sumpah Pemuda*: the Making and Meaning of a Symbol of Indonesian Nationhood", *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September 2000), pp. 377–410.

The PNI was dissolved and a new party, Partai Indonesia (Indonesia Party—Partindo) created under the leadership of Sartono, the Batavian lawyer and former prominent PNI member. It had the same ideological platform but a more cautious public profile. Sukarno and three other PNI leaders were put on trial in August 1930. The trial was a public relations disaster for the colonial government as it provided nationalists with a platform from which they could attack colonialism. Indonesian newspapers were able to publish these attacks without fear of retribution. Sukarno's defence oration, *Indonesia Accuses*, was serialised and the booklet became a best seller for the rest of the decade.[7] The four accused were convicted and jailed. Sukarno was released early in December 1931, as a parting gesture from the retiring Governor-General De Graeff. There were triumphant receptions in the major cities in Java in the days immediately after his release. Sukarno once again drew thousands of people to listen to his speeches in towns and cities throughout Java. Within a few months he joined Partindo and assumed its leadership.

Not all PNI members agreed with the party's dissolution and replacement by Partindo. Dissidents formed themselves first into independent groups (Golongan Merdeka) in the major cities in Java and then into the Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Education—PNI Baru). Under the leadership of Hatta and Sjahrir, both of whom had been prominent in Perhimpunan Indonesia while students in the Netherlands, PNI Baru competed with Partindo for dominance of the nationalist movement. Once again the colonial state intervened. Sukarno was arrested for a second time in August 1933. The government had learned its lesson from the earlier trial. This time he was summarily exiled from Java under the Governor-General's 'extraordinary rights'. Government employees were banned from membership of Partindo and PNI Baru, and both parties were banned from holding public meetings. Less than six months later similar treatment was meted out to key PNI Baru leaders, including Hatta and Sjahrir. The government was determined to keep nationalists on a very short leash.[8]

After the PNI was banned in 1930, the Surabaya doctor and social, economic and political activist, Sutomo, created the Persatuan Bangsa Indonesia (Union of the Indonesian Nation—PBI) in the hope that it might

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[7] Roget Paget (translator and editor), *Indonesia Accuses! Soekarno's Defence Oration in the Political Trial of 1930* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[8] On the PNI, Partindo and PNI Baru see Ingleson, *Road to Exile*.

assume the vacant leadership of the nationalist movement. This was not to be. The bans on Partindo and PNI Baru in the middle of 1933, and the later arrests and exiling of their leaders, provided Sutomo with another opportunity to try to create a political party that could be the major force in the nationalist movement. In December 1935 the Surabaya-based PBI and the Yogyakarta-based Budi Utomo amalgamated to form Partai Indonesia Raya (Greater Indonesia Party—Parindra). Parindra was the dominant political party for the rest of the colonial period. From May 1937 it was challenged by a more radical party, Gerakan Rakyat Indonesia (Movement of the Indonesian People—Gerindo), formed in Batavia by a group of young political activists.

Parindra and Gerindo, along with the smaller political parties, became increasingly frustrated at the narrow limits within which they were forced to operate and with the colonial government's refusal to engage with them in any meaningful way, despite the moderate nature of their activities. Sutomo was no radical, and neither were the other Parindra leaders who accepted seats in the Municipal Councils and the Volksraad in an effort to highlight the inequities in the colony and to influence government policy. The Netherlands disdainfully rejected the Sutardjo Petition passed by the Volksraad in 1936, which simply asked for a conference between representatives of the Netherlands and Indonesia to discuss the granting of political autonomy to Indonesia. In Susan Abeyasekere's words, "… the Parindrists themselves soon grew tired of trying to clap with one hand, and welcomed any alternatives that would give them more scope for action."[9] The alternative arrived in March 1942, but the welcome did not last very long.

Unions and Politics

Political activists understood the importance of organising urban workers in order to expand their constituencies. Union activists understood that organising urban workers was part of the broader nationalist movement. Many union leaders were involved with political parties just as many political leaders were involved with unions. Labour activism was, then, an integral part of the colonial nationalist movement. The demands of the labour movement were a major influence on the work programs of the political parties. Political parties had labour union sections and the agendas

[9] Susan Abeyasekere, "Partai Indonesia Raja, 1936–1942: a Study in Cooperative Nationalism", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (September 1972), p. 276.

of annual Congresses invariably included discussion of issues that directly concerned urban workers.

Labour unions challenged the colonial order of European control and native subservience. They threatened the interests of powerful companies whose profits were based on a cheap and docile labour force. In colonial Indonesia, where the Dutch refused to engage with nationalists and jailed or exiled those who challenged them, labour activism was a surrogate political activity for many Indonesians. Of course, in the constrained circumstances of a repressive colonial state labour union leaders had to constantly assert that the organisation of urban workers was non-political. Some believed this, but most did not.

The colonial government understood this well. There were some liberal-minded officials who distinguished the social and economic activities of labour unions from their engagement with the Indonesian nationalist agenda. The former were by and large seen as good while the latter were always seen as bad. Most officials held a different view, believing that in a colonial society organising native workers threatened not just the economic interests of European companies, but the very existence of the colonial state. After the communist uprising, liberal voices within the colonial government and the European community were drowned out by the voices of those who urged firm action against all Indonesian organisations.

The public position of the colonial government was that it was not opposed to labour unions for Indonesian workers. Indeed, immediately after the First World War some colonial officials had been supportive of the efforts of labour unions to improve workers' wages. However, the confrontations between workers and employers in the first half of the 1920s hardened the attitude of the government. While it continued to assert that it was not opposed to labour unions, it also made it clear that a legitimate labour union had to meet three conditions. First, leadership must be in the hands of workers themselves, not in the hands of political activists. Second, unions must be independent of nationalist political parties and not be involved in political activity. Union meetings should not discuss political issues and union journals should not push the nationalist agenda or challenge colonial authority. Third, unions should be concerned solely with negotiating wages and conditions and taking up individual grievances with employers in a non-confrontationist way. Disputes that could not be resolved with employers should be referred to the Labour Office or to local officials for resolution. Unions must not advocate or be involved in strikes.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s there were constant debates in the Indonesian press and in labour union magazines about the proper relationship between unions and political parties. Union and political leaders were aware of the history of labour movements in Europe. The English model was the most influential. Unions in England were industry and class-based, had united in a powerful national Trade Union Congress and had created a Labour Party. Indonesian union leaders were impressed by the evolution of the English labour movement into industrial and political wings that operated independently from each other but shared a common industrial, social and economic agenda. They contrasted this with the Netherlands where unions reflected the ideological and religious divisions of Dutch politics. Most opposed Indonesian labour unions being structurally attached to, or controlled by, political parties, fearing that it would weaken the labour movement by exacerbating the fissures of ethnicity, religion, and ideology.

When labour union leaders stated that unions should remain outside politics they did not mean that political issues such as opposition to colonialism should not be discussed. Nor did they mean that labour unions should avoid debate on post-independence economic and social structures. Rather, it was a belief that political parties should focus on the big political issues whereas labour unions should focus on industrial issues and issues of immediate interest to workers. It was important that labour unions and political parties cooperated, but most union activists wanted cooperation to be on a basis of independence and equality. For many, the achievement of independence was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for an improvement in workers' lives.

Indonesian labour union leaders were well aware that the organisation of workers in any country was a political act. It was about the structure of society and the economy. It was about power. They were in agreement that ending colonial rule was the only way workers would be truly able to improve their wages and conditions. They also agreed that ideally political and labour activities should be two sides of an integrated nationalist movement, which would include an array of mutual aid, economic, educational and health activities. However, they were acutely aware that Indonesia was neither a liberal democratic society like the Netherlands, where workers had a vote and social laws enabled them to organise freely, nor was it a colonial state like India, where the British were generally more tolerant of political and labour organisations. In the context of a repressive colonial

state, they believed that they had no choice but to accommodate, rather than confront, the colonial government if they were to achieve their goals.

Race, Class and Unions

One of the major debates among Indonesian and European labour union leaders was whether unions should be based on race or class. For unions representing senior managers and administrators the issue was simple. Members were predominantly recruits from the Netherlands who intended to work in the colony for a number of years but ultimately return to the Netherlands. Their unions had firm views on the place of 'natives' in the colonial order. There was no question of Indonesians becoming members. There was also no question of joining forces with European or Indonesian unions that represented the people they supervised and ruled. These European unions joined either the Federation of Unions of High Officials or the Federation of European Employees in the Indies.

It was more problematic for middle level workers and the unions that represented them. Most middle level 'white collar' workers were Eurasians, whether in the bureaucracy, state industries or the private sector. However, with the expansion of western education, in the 1920s and 1930s a growing number of Indonesians were employed in middle level jobs. In the State Railways, for example, by the end of the 1930s around 30 per cent of middle level workers were Indonesians. Eurasians and Indonesians increasingly worked side-by-side. This brought to the forefront the question of whether unions should be organised on class or race lines.

Unions for middle level workers were controlled largely by Eurasians or Indies-born Europeans: unions such as the Spoorbond for railway workers, the Postbond for post, telephone and telegraph workers, the Politiebond for policemen or the municipal employees' unions in the major cities. They accepted Indonesians as members, provided they were in middle level jobs. They had little time for the 'pure' European unions—what the municipal employees' union called the 'grand signeurs' of Indies workers.[10] Some of their more prominent leaders were members of the Indies Social Democratic Party (ISDP). They welcomed strong unions for Indonesian workers and had considerable sympathy for the difficulties they faced. They were also aware that a strong Indonesian labour movement would improve their own bargaining position with employers.

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[10] "Stromingen in De Indische Vakbeweging", *De S.B.B.*, 1 April 1937, p. 202.

These European unions argued that they promoted the interests of all middle level employees, irrespective of race. To some extent this was true. Through the 1930s they became a little less Eurasian as Indonesians joined in steadily increasing numbers. Many middle level Indonesian workers saw the world as much in class as race terms. They were very conscious of a gulf between themselves and the mass of Indonesian workers. Joining a European union was an expression of their aspirations and their social position. A few were even elected to branch executives and can be seen in photographs of delegates at annual meetings, proudly alongside their European/Eurasian colleagues.[11] Indonesian unions competed with European unions for these middle level workers. They needed their skills and networks of influence in workplaces and kampung.

At the same time as accepting increasing numbers of Indonesian members, European unions were well aware that the majority of their members were Eurasians, many of whom were nervous about upwardly mobile Indonesians taking 'their' jobs. Union leaders struggled to reconcile their desire to encourage Indonesian membership with protecting the interests of the Eurasian majority. In the 1930s, the European labour union federation, the Verbond van Vereenigingen van Landsdienaren (VVL), was criticised by some European unions for not doing enough to promote the interests of Eurasians. A rival federation, the Indische Vakorganisatie van Overheidspersoneel (CIVO) was formed to press Eurasian interests more forcefully.[12]

When Gerindo activists organised unions for private sector workers in the late 1930s they insisted that they were based on class rather than race. Eurasians, Chinese and Arab workers were welcome. Almost all other Indonesian unions accepted only Indonesians as members. Many aspired to cover all Indonesian workers in a particular industry, irrespective of rank, and tried to persuade middle level Indonesians to stay with them instead of joining European unions. Some restricted their membership to middle level workers because they believed that their interests were very different from the interests of the mass of workers. A few were created exclusively for lower level workers, arguing that the class divisions within the Indonesian workforce were being replicated inside Indonesian labour unions to

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[11] The Batavian branch of the Bond van Aministrative Personeel, a union for middle level municipal employees, reported in 1938 that 40 per cent of its 900 members were Europeans and 60 per cent Indonesians and Chinese. *Soeara Oemoem*, 20 April 1938.

[12] See, "Stromingen in de Indische Vakbeweging", *De Indische Vakbeweging*, 1 May 1937, pp. 2–5.

the disadvantage of the lower paid. While the Indonesian workplace was constructed around race divisions, it was also divided by ethnicity, gender and class. These differences were very deep, and had to be constantly confronted by labour union leaders.

While most Indonesian unions wanted to attract middle level workers they were frequently faced with complaints from lower level workers that unions were controlled by better-paid workers who treated them disrespectfully. Many educated 'white collar' workers held paternalistic attitudes towards lower level workers. Lower level workers resented this. Prominent labour activists, such as Sjahrir, Sukiman, Hindromartono and Djoko Said, lamented the residual 'feudal' attitudes in Indonesia, especially among Javanese. Many Indonesian workers who were graduates of western schools, spoke Dutch and had a 'white collar' jobs, disdained the mass of workers who had little or no western education and did more mundane jobs. The magazine of the unions for Indonesian employees of the municipal councils of Surabaya, Semarang and Bandung expressed this well in 1932. Many educated Indonesians, it stated, wanted to see themselves as 'tuan besar' (the boss), superior to workers such as typists, clerks, foremen or labourers, and therefore created separate unions for themselves or joined a European union. Educated workers, it argued, must throw off this sense of superiority and accept their responsibility to support and lead the Indonesian workforce as a whole:

> Do they not have a moral responsibility to act in this way, which if they accept as part of their support for the nation, will show organisations the correct path to follow?[13]

This admonition, and many more like it, had only limited impact. Unions made little headway on the 1930s in breaking down class and status divisions within the Indonesian workforce. They were serious impediments to the creation of industry-based unions and a strong labour union federation.

Gender and Unions

Labour unions were male domains. Union leadership at all levels was overwhelmingly male, as was union membership. The exceptions were unions for teachers and nurses, where women were a significant proportion of the workforces. These unions were controlled by men at the central level but

[13] *Soeloeh Kita*, February 1932, pp. 175–178.

in the 1930s women slowly moved into leadership positions at the branch level. In general, though, labour union leaders held conservative views of the place of women: they were supporters of their menfolk, followers rather than leaders, and nurturers of families rather than public figures.

The government contributed to this view by denying married women in the public sector permanent employment. Female employees who married forfeited their permanency and with it pension rights and other benefits that flowed only to permanent workers. The Depression years saw increased discrimination against women employees in the public sector. Married women were targeted for redundancy first, on the grounds that male breadwinners had to be protected.[14] From August 1933, women were automatically dismissed when they married and only re-employed, as temporary workers, if there was nobody on unemployment pay (wachtgeld) looking for a job.[15]

Most labour unions opposed the increased discrimination against married women in the Depression years. The two major public sector federations, the PVPN for Indonesian unions and the VVL for Europeans unions, repeatedly argued that the policy was unfair and should be abandoned. Many individual unions also publicly spoke against the policy, particularly teachers' unions because female teachers were especially affected. The opposition of central union leaders was not always supported at the local level. Schools owned by the assistant teachers' union, the PGB, adopted the same policy as the government.[16] Other voices were heard arguing that women should not hold government jobs because this would be at the expense of men who had to maintain a family.[17] The Bandung branch of the Spoorbond, the union for largely European middle level railway workers, for example, argued that women who were not 'breadwinners' should be made redundant first, followed by older male workers of pensionable age. Voices supporting discrimination against women employees in the

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[14] See a discussion in *De School*, 18 August 1933, pp. 481–482. When the government issued a circular to department heads in December 1933 that married female public employees should be discharged first, it added that this also applied to concubines. The European teachers union was a little incredulous as to how this would be policed. See, "Ontslag aan huwende ambtenaressen", *De School*, 22 December 1933.

[15] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 August 1933.

[16] *Soeara Oemoem*, 10 March 1938.

[17] See, "Soal Pengangguran", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 14 April 1934, and *De School*, 18 August 1933.

public sector caused the prominent women's organisation, Isteri Sadar, to remind unions and government that women were workers too.[18]

The voices of women were seldom heard within labour unions. While women were more than 20 per cent of the workforce in factories and workshops in the 1930s, they were concentrated in the cigarette, batik and textile industries that were mostly located in smaller inland towns, and which drew most of their labour from nearby villages.[19] Labour unions were concentrated in the major cities, or at least in industries like the railways, which were based in the major cities, and even in these cities unions found it difficult to recruit workers employed in the private sector. They had almost no success among private sector employees in the inland towns, not helped by the fact that male leaderships had no natural linkages into the largely female workplaces of the cigarette, batik or textile factories.

Female workers in colonial Indonesia were paid significantly less than their male counterparts when doing the same job. Again, employers and government were reflecting the situation in the western world. Susan Blackburn posed the question of why women's organisations in the 1920s and 1930s paid so little attention to the plight of women in the wage-earning sector of the colonial economy. Her explanation was that they were organisations led by middle class women who, apart from daily contact with female domestic workers, had little understanding of the industrial plight of women in factories and workshops. One exception was the outrage expressed after the publication by the Labour Office of a report into the batik industry, which detailed the exploitation of women at Lassem. In Blackburn's view, though, this was a concern about sexual exploitation rather than industrial exploitation.[20]

The much more limited educational opportunities for Indonesian women meant that men dominated the jobs that required literacy and numeracy. By the 1930s the proportion of women state employees was improving, especially in teaching and nursing. Nevertheless, nurses' unions continued to be led by men, as did teachers' unions. During the 1930s there were some

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[18] See the speech of Woro Atmadji at an Isteri Sadar public meeting in Mataram, 20 November 1932, reported in *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 21 November 1932.

[19] In 1934 there were 141,411 workers in factories and workshops in the Indies, of whom 29,081 were women. The proportions for Java alone are similar, with a total of 117,828 workers of whom 25,768 were women. W.A.I.M. Segers (ed.), *Changing Economy in Indonesia. Volume 8. Manufacturing Industry 1870–1942* (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 1987), p. 77.

[20] Susan Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 170–175.

observable changes at the branch level. Photographs taken at annual Congresses reveal a small but growing number of women branch delegates and in the late 1930s over 25 per cent of the membership of the major nurses' union were women, with women beginning to take on the roles of treasurer or secretary at branch level.[21]

Most unions relegated women to social and economic roles. Many organised women's auxiliaries in the 1930s, including unions for pawnshop workers, postal workers, teachers and for workers in the colonial bureaucracy. These women's auxiliaries had their own executives, usually wives of more senior or more skilled workers and often the wives of branch leaders. They organised cooperatives and libraries, and during the Depression years created support groups, refuges, and small-scale cottage industries for unemployed women. Occasionally, a women's auxiliary was involved in a larger enterprise. For example, the Wanita Utomo at Mataram, Central Java—the women's auxiliary of the pawnshops workers' union—built a textile factory in the mid 1930s which provided employment for three hundred women.[22]

Structures

Labour unions were significant organisations in the towns and cities of Java in the 1920s and the 1930s. After 1926 the Labour Office compiled statistics, which provide a broad picture of the fluctuating strength of unions. From a low point of about 20,000 members in 1926, labour union membership grew quickly to a peak of 111,344 in 1931. There was a sharp decline in the Depression years, to a low of 47,291 in 1936, but with the recovery of the economy membership again grew to 110,870 in 1940. This was the official membership of all labour unions, including those for Europeans as well as for Indonesians. It is impossible to arrive at an accurate figure for the total number of Indonesian members of unions because a significant number of middle level Indonesian workers joined European unions. However, from 1931 the Labour Office separated the figures for unions controlled by Indonesians. It reported that there were 75,485 members of 46 Indonesian unions in 1931, 30,525 members of 36 unions in 1936 and 82,906 members of 35 unions in 1940.[23]

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[21] *Soeara PKVI*, April-May 1938.
[22] See, "Istri dan Pergerkan", *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 July 1937.
[23] *Indische Verslag* 1932–1941.

The vast majority of Indonesian members of labour unions after 1926 worked in the public sector. They were far easier to organise than workers in the private sector. Most of the graduates of Dutch-language schools were employed by the colonial bureaucracy, the educational system or by government enterprises such as the pawnshops, the railways and the post office. They were easier to reach through the written word, more aware of the social and political changes taking place in the colony and more articulate in defence of what they saw as their status and rights. The colonial government was also subject to union and political pressure in a way that private employers were not. There were clearly defined and publicly notified employment, promotion and salary regulations, open to challenge in the press, the Volksraad and even by sympathisers in the Dutch parliament. The large public sector unions had continuous organisations through to the Japanese occupation. There was continuity of leadership, with some unions building significant assets to support their activities.

The largest unions for government workers had stable central executives that produced regular magazines for members and held annual Congresses which brought together delegates from branches all around the colony. Congresses were large affairs. In October 1939, for example, 1,633 delegates from 66 branches attended the Congress of the federation of teacher unions.[24] Many unions operated commercial enterprises or social service subsidiaries for members. Aside from the large insurance company created by the federation of teacher unions, the pawnshop workers' union, the railway workers' union and the federation of teacher unions all owned printing works. From 1931 to 1934 the pawnshop workers' union published *Oetoesan Indonesia* a forthright daily newspaper in Yogyakarta. Nurses' unions created polyclinics in the 1930s and all unions had savings groups, cooperatives and mutual benefit funds.

Privately employed workers in the urban economy were much more difficult to organise. There were few large employers, a much smaller proportion of western-educated Indonesians employed by them, and little sense of shared experience among workers scattered throughout the major towns and cities. Wages and conditions were far less systematised and were subject only to occasional scrutiny by the Labour Office and to moral pressure applied by government officials from time to time. A large percentage of privately employed workers were either first generation urban residents, with continuing links with villages, or circular migrants who financially

[24] *Pemandangan*, 28 October 1939.

contributed to the village economy while working in the towns and cities and who spent some part of each year in the village. There were no large-scale Indonesian- owned industries. Although the urban workforce grew considerably in the 1920s, and with the exception of the worst years of the Depression continued to grow in the 1930s, privately-owned workshops and factories remained relatively small.

These inherent difficulties were compounded by the refusal of private employers to recognise Indonesian labour unions. They were not legally required to deal with labour unions or to have collective agreements. Few permitted union leaders to enter workplaces. Pamphlets advertising meetings had to be spread surreptitiously by workers. Employers were vigilant. If a worker was found distributing union pamphlets, or even having a pamphlet in his possession, he risked a fine or dismissal. In the major cities, industry associations restricted competition between companies over wages. Fingerprinting and work cards helped to weed out 'undesirable' workers.

Unions for private sector workers led a precarious existence. They were created by organisations such as the Indonesian Study Club in Surabaya, by political parties or by activist individuals. All were 'outsiders' who struggled to develop linkages into workplaces or develop leadership from workers themselves.[25] Like the more established unions for public sector workers, they too created mutual benefit funds as a way of attracting and keeping members. Dozens of industry specific and city-wide unions for private sector workers were formed in the late 1920s and the 1930s. Some thrived for a while but most disappeared very quickly. There were some exceptions. The Indonesia Study Club sponsored a number of unions for private sector workers in the late 1920s and early 1930s which had longer lives, largely because of organisational support provided by the Study Club.

Branch meetings of most public and private sector unions had to be held outside the workplaces, though the State Railways and the Post Office were more accommodating in the 1930s. Buildings owned by nationalist parties in Surabaya, Bandung and Batavia were frequent locations for meetings, as were local cinemas, the premises of political parties, schools owned by Taman Siswa and other national groups and even the houses of prominent

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[25] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has argued that outside leadership was characteristic of unions in South Asia: " So, the discourse on labour history in South Asia was initially developed by these surrogate spokesmen, representing labour and assuming an adversarial role as advocates in labour's struggle against capital and the colonial state." "Introduction", in Supplement to the *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 52 (2006), p. 8.

kampung residents. Advertising was mostly by word of mouth in the workplaces and kampung, supplemented by flyers distributed through the kampung to advertise major public meetings addressed by national leaders. Having a well-known person address a meeting was an effective way of attracting an audience and establishing a new branch. Propaganda trips by national and regional union leaders, where they might speak at two or more meetings a day, were well organised and effective, though because they were a significant expense many unions could only afford them occasionally.

The labour movement was even more fragmented after 1926 than it had been before. The major public sector unions created colony-wide organisations, though dominated by branches in Java, but they too competed with each other. In the late 1920s, for example, there were two railway unions, one based in Bandung and the other in Surabaya, five major unions for Indonesian teachers, three for postal workers and a number for nurses. It was even worse for privately employed workers. All of the major cities had their own unions for workers in the private sector, despite the efforts of political parties to create regional or Java-wide unions. Political parties competed with each other to attract them into their own labour unions. The result was small, often ineffective, unions with short life spans.

There were many attempts to create colony-wide labour union federations, with only limited success until the formation of the Federation of Public Sector Unions (PVPN) in 1930. A loose federation led by the Volksraad member Suroso, the PVPN managed to bring together key public sector unions, held annual congresses where major social and economic issues were debated and through its chairman's membership of the Volksraad, was able to ensure public debate on issues of concern to urban workers. By the end of the decade it had established its authority as the coordinating body for public sector unions. It had organised dozens of protest meeting and created a common industrial agenda for public and private sector workers alike. A number of Java-wide labour union federations for private sector workers or city-wide federations for workers in both private and public sectors were established, but they were all short-lived.

Labour unions were more successful in developing structures that linked branch offices to workplaces and kampung. The major unions for both public and private sector workers put a lot of effort into developing and sustaining these linkages. They organised literacy programs, sporting clubs and cultural events in the kampung. Through an array of social welfare provisions they maintained regular contact with members. Workers from

a particular workplace or industry often lived in distinct sectors of a town or city which made it easier for union branch leaders to organise among them.

Labour unions were constantly short of money to sustain their small paid staff, publish their magazines and carry out educational and industrial activities. The major source of income was fees, but getting members to pay on a regular basis was a constant challenge. The fees charged by the railway workers' union, the PBST, were typical. Members paid an initial joining fee of five guilders and a monthly fee of one per cent of their wages to a maximum of one guilder. Less than half of the members paid their fees regularly. In 1932 the PBST had a nominal membership of about 5,500 but estimated that if all members paid their fees regularly it would have double its actual monthly income.[26] The experience of the PBST was common.

Unions issued membership cards in return for the joining fee, but the promised monthly contributions had to be collected from individual workers by branch executive members or local organisers. Lower paid workers who lived on the margins found it hard to pay union fees when typically they earned a monthly income of 30 guilders or less. Fees had to be collected at branch meetings, when members attended union offices or from direct approaches to workers in the kampung. Unions for skilled workers were at an advantage, not only because skilled workers had greater capacity to pay but also because they were more likely to live close together in company-owned houses. It was much more difficult, for example, for taxi drivers' unions to collect fees from drivers who were scattered throughout the urban kampung and whose incomes fluctuated greatly.

Unions depended not only on members paying their dues regularly but on donations, fund raising events, profits from selling booklets and magazines and commissions from selling insurance policies to members. Other major non-cash support came from nationalist organisations that owned buildings in the major cities and provided free access for labour union meetings. Sympathetic owners—usually Chinese-Indonesians—made local cinemas available for major meetings and Congresses. Advertising in union magazines was a small additional source of revenue. The *Bumiputera 1912* insurance company, established by the teacher unions, and the Indonesian National Bank, established by the Indonesian Study Club in Suraba-

[26] *Kareta Api*, February-March 1932. See, *Kereta Api*, May 1940 for a detailed breakdown of the union's income and expenditure for the past year.

ya, were frequent advertisers in union magazines and Indonesian-language newspapers. Local shops and service providers as well as consumer goods manufacturers, such as cigarette, textiles and batik companies, were also frequent advertisers. Unions that owned printeries made a profit from external work which was used to support union activities.

Most unions for government workers published magazines. The large unions, for pawnshop workers, for railway workers and for teachers, published magazines regularly through to the Japanese occupation. They usually appeared monthly or bi-monthly. Some of the unions for workers in the private sector also published magazines, but they were more modest in scope and appeared irregularly. Magazines were an important way in which central leaders communicated with branches and ordinary members. They contained articles by central leaders and transcripts of major speeches delivered at Congresses, together with extensive reports from branches on local activities, and reports on union finances. Sometimes there were contributions or letters from members, but by and large magazines reflected the views of the western educated central leaders.

The language of labour union magazines was a marker of the class divisions in colonial Indonesia. Europeans carried out their business and their personal lives using Dutch. Eurasians in professional and higher level jobs also preferred to use Dutch. The magazines of European unions with a predominantly Eurasian membership, as well as those with a largely expatriate membership, were in Dutch. Dutch was also the language of union meetings. Fluency in Dutch was considered a sign of an educated person and, as a requirement for most middle level jobs, a clear status indicator. For these reasons, this was the chosen language of public sector unions for middle level Indonesians. Some unions, such as the union for middle level workers in the post, telephone and telegraph service and the union for middle level civil servants, published their magazines mostly in Dutch but with some articles in Indonesian in recognition that not all members were comfortable in Dutch. It was different for the larger Indonesian public sector unions which realised that in order to attract lower level workers the language of communication had to be Indonesian. Their magazines frequently published translated articles from the Dutch language press and European labour unions. There seems to have been very few publications in Javanese aimed at urban workers, none of which were published by labour unions, and there are only occasional reports of branch meetings using Javanese as well as Indonesian in an effort to engage with day-wage

labourers. The magazines of unions for private sector workers were always in Indonesian.

Leaders

Union leaders at the central level were members of the new western-educated elite. For some, the political movement was paramount and labour activism a secondary activity. Others, while identifying strongly with the political movement, and often members of a political party, devoted most of their energies to labour activism. All were fluent in Dutch and most also in English. Most were well read in the economic and political history of Europe. They were members of a generation steeped in the writings of Marxist theorists and fascinated by the energy and the promise of political parties on the left in Europe. It was a generation angry at the injustices of colonialism and ashamed of the subservience of their people. Some would have welcomed being described as Marxists. Others would not. Whatever their political convictions, few analysed the struggle between labour and capital in other than broadly Marxist terms.

They were passionate nationalists, committed to the nation-building project. They wanted to educate urban workers and draw them into this project. They were well aware of the religious, class, ethnic and regional differences dividing workplaces and communities, and were conscious of their own multiple identities with the attendant tensions and contradictions. They were committed to an independent Indonesia, to the need for workers to unite against employers in order to improve wages and conditions, and to the importance of Indonesian ownership and control of the economy. There was no doubt in their minds that the western-educated elite would lead the nation-building project, including leading labour unions. Only a very few could conceive of leadership of labour unions emerging from workers themselves and those that could believed that this would be possible only after a lengthy process of tutelage.

Some of the central leaders controlled large unions with branches in most of the major towns and cities in Java and sometimes beyond. Others controlled smaller unions with branches limited to one of the larger cities or a region. Many had been educated in the Netherlands, but by the 1930s an increasing number were graduates of higher education institutions in the colony itself. High profile leaders such as Sukiman, Sjahrir, Sutomo, Surjopranoto, Agus Salim, Ruslan Wongsokusumo, Hindromartono and

Suroso were chairmen of, or principal advisers to, the larger public sector unions that dominated the colonial labour movement. They were editors of union magazines and Indonesian-language newspapers and were prolific writers on local and international labour issues as well as on the political issues of the day. They were in constant demand to speak at public meetings of both unions and political parties. Some were self-employed professionals, while others had more or less abandoned their professional lives to become full-time political and labour activists.

Central office holders of labour unions were usually paid a monthly salary, or, if funds were tight, a small honorarium. It was quite usual for a central union leader to hold a number of paid positions with unions as well as to receive an income from a professional practice, a government job or a position with a political party. There is some comparative data for union leaders incomes in 1940. Suroso, member of the Volksraad and chairman of the federation of public sector unions, the PVPN, was also chairman of three Yogyakarta unions and a people's credit society. He received 170 guilders a month for his work as a Volksraad member together with a pension from his former work in the colonial bureaucracy and an honorarium from the VIPIW. The pawnshop workers' union paid Sukiman, its chairman, and Volksraad member Wiwoho, its patron, 100 guilders a month each. The leading Surabaya union activist and political leader Ruslan Wongsokusumo reportedly earned 500 guilders a month from his work as chairman of the major nurses' union, an adjunct inspector for the *Bumiputera 1912* insurance company and a Parindra leader in Surabaya.[27]

In their speeches and writings, labour union leaders sought to create narratives that would enable workers to make sense of their personal experiences. Narratives were made and re-made as leaders sought to find ways of engaging urban workers whose lives and mental worlds were very different from their own. They tried to educate workers about the universality of the struggle between capital and labour. Their frame of reference was England and Europe. Speeches and writing were peppered with brief histories of the labour movements in England and European countries, with frequent references to how labour unions had emerged from workers themselves as a consequence of the development of class consciousness.

The history of the European labour movement convinced labour union leaders that they had to work not just to improve wages and conditions but also to change the economic structures within which workers lived. In

[27] *Kereta Api*, 5 October 1940.

order to create a more prosperous society with a fairer distribution of wealth, the Indonesian economy had to be restructured, with a strong emphasis on cooperatives and economic intervention by the state. As the Depression impacted on the colony, labour unions increasingly stressed the importance of self-help activities. The development of banks, cooperatives and other mutual aid organisations, which would circumvent foreign-owned institutions and local moneylenders, were ways to empower workers in their day-to-day lives.

There was a constant debate as to whether a labour union should be led by 'insiders' or 'outsiders'. It was a debate that had existed since the formation of the first Indonesian labour unions, but it became more intense after 1926 as it was linked to the debate on the proper relationship between unions and political parties. On the one hand, there was the pragmatic recognition that a union with outside leaders risked a strong reaction from the state. On the other hand, there was the view that given Indonesia's stage of economic and social development it was unrealistic to believe that effective leadership could come from workers themselves. Even among those who acknowledged that branch leadership could emerge from workers themselves, there was still a conviction that outside leadership was a way of avoiding the pressure placed on activist workers by employers.

Strong branches were the key to strong unions and the quality of branch leadership was critical. A few branch leaders shared the class and educational background of central leaders. They were self-employed professionals or middle level workers in government departments and state-owned enterprises. Most, however, had been educated only in the lower and middle level schools in the colony and were still working in the particular industry. Some were fluent in Dutch but most were more comfortable in Indonesian. Most were the more highly skilled and better paid workers, though the success of the railway workers' union and the union for post, telephone and telegraph workers in the late 1930s owed much to their recruitment of lower level workers onto branch executives.[28]

Branch leaders were the link between central union leaders and workers. For many, election to the executive of a union branch was their first experience of a modern organisation. The hundreds of local branches of unions

[28] The PBST is an example. In 1928 the executive of its Purwokerto branch was composed of a conductor as chairman, an engine driver as vice-chairman, a draughtsman as first secretary, a station assistant as second secretary and a chief draughtsman as treasurer. Other members of the executive were two clerks, an engine driver, a signal foreman and a draughtsman. *Kereta Api*, October 1928.

in the 1920s and the 1930s each had a chairman, a vice-chairman, a secretary, a treasurer and a number of ordinary members of the executive. Agendas had to be drawn up, minutes taken, motions debated and recorded, membership fees collected and propaganda meetings organised. Thousands of urban workers obtained their first leadership experience through involvement in a union branch. For many, the branch was the union. Head office was a long way away. They believed that they were more in touch with ordinary members, more aware of their grievances and more conscious of their social and economic needs. It was branches that organised small cooperatives, savings and credit groups or clinics. It was to branches that members first turned when they needed assistance. Branch leaders were well aware of their power within the unions, not least because it was branches that collected membership fees. Relationships between branch leaders and union head offices were sometimes strained as the former tried to assert their independence.

Branch leaders have left no memoirs or personal letters that might provide insights into their motivations for devoting so much time to local leadership of labour unions. It was unpaid work and had the potential to bring them into conflict with their employers. Judging from reports of branch meetings they had a strong commitment to wage justice and the creation of a fairer society. For many, union leadership was just one of their community commitments. They were often also involved in local charities, religious groups and kampung associations.[29] Leadership in a labour union gave them a sense of empowerment over their lives and a way of participating in the creation of a new society. It was a practical way of living out the idea of Indonesia.

Union head offices were located in one of the major cities in Java—Bandung, Batavia, Yogyakarta, Semarang or Surabaya—usually in rented premises in the centre of town, although a few of the larger public sector unions purchased their own buildings which housed their headquarters and commercial activities. Head offices, and some of the larger branch offices, opened daily, often in the evenings as well in order to attract people after work. They managed small libraries, and subscribed to daily newspa-

[29] Many examples could be quoted. Usman Widikartiko was a typical local union activist. He was a teacher at the Dutch-Indies School in Wonogiri, Central Java, and an executive member of the federation of Indonesian teacher unions, the PGHB. He had also at various times been an executive member of the local branches of Budi Utomo and Muhammadiyah and an executive member of local charities and cooperatives. See, *Persatoean Goeroe*, 1929 (n.d.), p. 85.

pers for members to read. They sold copies of union magazines and booklets, heard complaints and provided free advice on matters ranging from industrial matters to legal and financial issues. Unions were supported by sympathetic lawyers, doctors, nurses and other professionals who provided free advice or support to members, sometimes through referrals and sometimes through regular consultations at union offices. The larger unions had paid office staff, though the number of employees fluctuated greatly in keeping with their ability to persuade members to pay dues regularly and to persuade branches to send membership fees to head office. The major unions also employed full-time organisers on the ground, usually former employees from the industry.

This pattern of leadership was both a strength and a weakness. Its strength was that the western-educated central union leaders were members of a small, closely-knit, but sometimes fractious, intellectual elite. They were well read in European labour history and often well-connected with the labour movement in the Netherlands. They were able to place Indonesian workers' grievances into the broader context of the struggle between capital and labour. They brought an intellectual rigour and organisational knowledge to labour unions as well as an ability to negotiate with employers and government on workers' behalf. They shaped the ideological tone of union meetings, rallies and magazines, as they sought to educate ordinary workers to see their grievances over wages and conditions in the wider context of the anti-colonial struggle and the international labour movement.

Its weakness was the gap between central and branch leaders, often reflected in a lack of a shared understanding of the nature and direction of union activities. Lacking organic links with workers, central leaders struggled at times to assert their authority over branch activists. The gap between central leaders and ordinary workers was even wider. The western-educated intellectual elite who led labour unions found it hard to understand urban workers whose world views and daily lives were so different from their own. The term 'masih bodoh' was a phrase frequently used by union leaders to explain workers' behaviour. Literally meaning 'still stupid', it was a patronising term reflecting the self-perception of many union leaders of their role and masking frustration that workers did not respond in ways that they thought they should. Letters to editors and interjections at branch meetings make it clear that many workers considered the term insulting and demeaning.

The frequent use of the term 'masih bodoh' to describe the working classes was part of the language of labour union leaders which reflected their own social class. Labour unions leaders commonly used metaphors such as teacher/student, parent/child, and body/limbs when voicing their views on the ideal relationship between leaders and followers. A speech in 1932 by the chairman of the Semarang branch of the nurses' union, Perhimpunan Kaum Verplegers(sters) dan Vroedvrouwen Bumiputera (PKVB), managed to use all three metaphors. After outlining the problem of unions and the responsibility of members, he argued that the relationship between leaders and members should be like that of a teacher to students or a father to children. He compared the connection between members and leaders to that between body and spirit. The body must be led by the spirit, but the wishes of the spirit were unlikely to be achieved if not supported by the body.[30]

There is evidence that lower level workers resented the paternalism of the skilled workers who dominated union branches. A forestry worker complained in 1928 that at union meetings foremen and clerks did all the talking, with lower level workers expected to keep silent and agree. Moreover, office workers expected to be treated with great respect by outdoor workers. No wonder, he said, that higher level workers had time to be involved in unions when they finished work at 2 pm, while workers like him did not get back home until 7 pm.[31] A separate article in the same issue illustrated the truth of the argument only too well by criticising lower level workers for not joining the union and accusing them of stupidity because they accepted arbitrary actions of managers even when those actions were obviously wrong. [32] The gap between lower level workers and the better-educated middle level workers was difficult to bridge.

In the eyes of the middle class intellectuals, labour unions had a strong moral purpose. They believed that they had a responsibility to provide leadership, and part of that responsibility was to educate workers to take greater control of their lives and to behave more responsibly. The worker as gambler, or womaniser, or spendthrift, were common themes in labour union magazines. The literature of all Indonesian organisations in the colony—labour unions, political parties or socio-economic and religious organisations—had a noticeable emphasis on the self-improvement of

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30 The speech by Sadin is published in *Soeara PKVB*, May-June 1932.
31 "Anak-ketjil tertawa", *Soeara Boschwezen*, July 1928.
32 "Soewara PPB", *Soeara Boschwezen*, July 1928.

ordinary people. Literacy courses and libraries would educate workers while social welfare organisations would teach the values of frugality and prudence.[33]

A frequent refrain was that workers were irresponsible and did not take union membership seriously. The railway workers' union in 1933 lamented that less than twenty per cent of railway workers understood the value of their union and that even of those who join "… a large number still posses the Native characteristic of being easily bored." There were also too many who wanted to be members, wanted to read the magazine, but did not want to pay membership fees.[34] Far too many railway workers accepted their fate. They were grateful for wages rises but not prepared to do anything for the union:

> This is no different from the attitude of a parasite, that does no work for, or provide support to, the labour movement except when it produces immediate benefits, then it is pleased to eat the fruit.[35]

Union magazines often published apocryphal stories that placed ordinary workers in a poor light. In 1939, for example, the Batavia branch of the customs workers' union published a story about a unionist meeting a low level customs worker who was not a member of the union. He asked the non-unionist if he realised that his wage had increased from 15 to 17 guilders a month from January 1938. This, he said, was the result of union pressure on the government, supported by Volksraad member Oto Iskandardinata. The low level worker replied that he had only vaguely heard of Iskandardinata and the union. He then asked what he could do. The answer was sharp:

> God, you really are stupid. You must follow the intellectuals who understand these matters. Then you will not have to trouble your head anymore. You should feel ashamed. You never pay your contributions to our union but you receive the fruit of its work. I can only say that you are somebody who lacks human feelings. Is that so?

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[33] Nandini Goopta has written of similar sentiments among the Indian elite in the latter decades of colonial rule: "Indeed, the mission of social and moral reform was a central element in the relations of the Indian elite to those whom they identified as the poor and the lower classes." Nandini Goopta, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India*, p. 14.

[34] *Kareta Api*, September 1933.

[35] *Kareta Api*, October 1933.

The low level worker, suitable chastised, meekly said that he now understood and in the morning would go to the union office to join.[36] Perhaps stories like this were intended to stimulate members to paying their fees regularly. Perhaps they were intended to be used by members in recruiting fellow workers. Whatever the intention, they reflected the paternalism of those who controlled labour unions and the deep gulf between them and the working classes.

Members

In 1938 a propagandist for the union for middle level post office workers, the Midpost, wrote of the difficulty of persuading fellow workers to join. Workers often told him, "I do not want to become a member of the Midpost because what is the use of suffering financially by paying monthly contributions?" One worker rebuffed him, saying that "I do not want to become a member … when my wages and rank increase are no different from those of a worker who has become a union member."[37] It was a common problem for unions, not just in colonial Indonesia. In western countries, unions increasingly found a solution in the 'closed shop', where employers were forced to make union membership a condition of employment. This was not possible in colonial Indonesia where there were no collective agreements and no way of forcing employers to the negotiating table.

The relatively large membership of labour unions in the last two decades of colonial Indonesia reflected the range of roles they played in workers' lives. Apart from protecting workers' wages and conditions and supporting individuals in the face of arbitrary and unjust treatment by employers, labour unions provided other less tangible but nevertheless significant benefits to members. Local branches had an important social function and helped create a sense of community. Meetings covered a range of practical issues affecting workers' everyday lives. Reports of local branch meetings reveal a strong sense of solidarity among members as they shared their grievances and saw their lives in broader perspective. Labour unions provided many workers with a sense of empowerment.

Urban workers were attracted by the promises of action to improve wages and conditions and to provide support in times of need. At the local level, unions focused on hours of work, rest days, pay rates, overtime pay-

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[36] "Tol en Lol", *Soeara Pabean*, January 1939, p. 4.
[37] *Het Postblad*, September 1938, pp. 335–336.

ments and arbitrary treatment, all issues which affected workers on a daily basis. They organised social, sporting and cultural activities and provided regular education programs, ranging from literacy and Dutch language courses to courses on simple bookkeeping and household budgeting. Through courses, lending libraries and public meetings, as well as through the columns of their magazines and newspapers, they educated urban workers about their rights, constantly placing them in an international context. They were an important part of the lives of many urban workers.

The industrial role, the social role, the role in creating a sense of solidarity and community were important, but do not on their own account for the number of workers who joined labour unions. For many workers labour unions were worth joining because they provided a measure of social security. There was almost no state-provided social welfare in colonial Java. Some employers provided limited social welfare, ranging from food allowance to access to medical services and cooperatives. This was common in the state-owned sector of the economy and in large foreign-owned companies but less usual elsewhere. Permanent workers employed by the state and by the larger private companies such as the railways and the sugar factories also received small pensions on retirement. However, most urban workers had to cope as best they could with the ever-present threat of unemployment, sickness or death and the worries of old age. They looked to local welfare organisations, self-help groups and increasingly to labour unions to support them at moments of crisis in their lives.

The uncertainties of urban life in Java saw a flourishing of cooperative societies from the late 1920s, complementing long-standing neighbourhood support groups in the kampung. A government report in 1930 revealed the extent of these cooperative societies in the three major Java cities of Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya. In Batavia there were 14 Indonesian cooperatives coordinated into a Persatuan Cooperatie Indonesia. PNI members had leading roles in the coordinating body. In Semarang there were 10 Indonesian cooperatives, coordinated into a Centraal Cooperatie. In Surabaya nine cooperatives were coordinated into a Persatuan Perhimpunan Cooperatie Indonesia. Indonesian Study Club members had leading roles.[38] Most labour union leaders saw union mutual benefit funds as a way of providing practical support to workers and at the same time creat-

[38] See, "Verzorging van geestelijke behoeften en sociale welvaartszorg uit Inlandschen kring", enclosed in Adviser for Native Affairs to Governor-General, 29 April 1930, Mail Report 1930/856, pp. 16–18.

ing a stronger civil society. They also realised that it was an effective way of attracting new members.

Most labour unions established a number of inter-connected mutual benefit funds. Membership was optional but many unions reported that over half joined, a clear indication of their value to members. Unions were careful to maintain the integrity of these funds by keeping separate accounts and ensuring that they were not used for day-to-day activities. A death benefits fund was invariably created first, followed by a cooperative and a savings fund and less frequently by a sickness and accident fund. The larger unions supplemented branch level mutual funds with mutual benefit funds under the direct control of the central executives. Smaller unions, especially those catering for workers in the private sector, also endeavoured to create centralised mutual benefit funds but these often had to compete with local bodies restricted to people in one factory or workshop and usually organised by foremen.

There was considerable debate within labour unions on the place of mutual benefit funds and other socio-economic organisations in the labour movement struggle. The dominant view was that labour unions should work not just to improve wages and conditions but should also be concerned with the overall welfare of their members. It was accepted that Indonesia could only become a prosperous society with a fairer distribution of wealth by freeing itself from the colonial yoke, but at the same time there was an acknowledgement of the economic weakness of the country. The Indonesian economy had to be restructured after independence, with a strong emphasis on cooperatives and economic intervention by the state. In the meantime, ordinary people needed to be empowered in their day-to-day lives by the development of voluntary organisations such as banks, cooperatives and other mutual benefit organisations that would free them from the grip of foreign-owned institutions and local moneylenders.

Many central leaders were concerned, though, that the mutual benefit functions of labour unions not divert workers' attention from the struggle to improve wages and conditions and to change the structures of society. They kept reminding workers that the root cause of indebtedness was low wages, which did not cover the basic necessities of life, let alone allow for times of crisis or retirement. Worker militancy must not be blunted by actions which, while alleviating poverty, would not remove its fundamental causes. Some union leaders were also concerned that the only people who had money to spare for union-created mutual benefit funds were the better paid workers. While many central union leaders had reservations about

too much energy being placed into social and economic activities, they realised that strong mutual benefit funds could increase workers' bargaining power with employers by sustaining them during strikes or lock-outs.[39] There was much talk of union-based mutual benefit fund being one component of a 'fighting fund'.

Scattered reports from labour union journals indicate that younger workers were more likely to become members than older workers. This may have been because younger workers had less to lose than older workers who were concerned about job security and retirement pensions. It may also have reflected the growing number of western-educated graduates from the expanding public and private schools entering the job market in the late 1920s and the 1930s. These young people were probably strongly influenced by the nationalist messages they read in the Indonesian-language press and heard at the political rallies. There is some evidence that employers were particularly concerned about what they saw as radical views held by the graduates of some of the city trade schools.

[39] See the views of Sunkono, Marsudi, Sutomo and Sosrokardono in 1927 at a public meeting of the savings fund of the post and telegraph workers' union in Surabaya, *Sinar Indonesia*, 15 February 1927.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM CONFRONTATION TO ACCOMMODATION

In December 1928 a passenger in a Surabaya taxi asked the driver if he had joined the newly formed taxi drivers' union. He was assured that it was safe to join. The driver was unconvinced. He replied that he had not heard of the new union, but he knew that if an organisation was bad its members would be sent to Boven Digul.[1] The story illustrates the extent to which Indonesian workers had become wary of association with unions. Too many people had been arrested and too many threatened with losing their jobs. Workers were afraid. Rebuilding the labour movement had to start with restoring confidence that unions were safe to join.

Workers had retreated from labour unions in the face of government and employer pressure. But the world view of many had been changed by exposure to issues of race and class, fairness and justice, and by their involvement in local branches. In 1927, labour unions had a solid base on which to rebuild. Confrontation with employers and the government was no longer a viable option. They had to develop new strategies to overcome workers' fears and convince them that they could deliver on their promises. They had to develop narratives which would encourage workers to make a long-term commitment.

Indonesian and European Unions

European unions had observed the rise and fall of Indonesian labour unions, their struggles to build enduring branch structures and retain worker support, and the fierce reaction of the colonial state to the strike waves of the early 1920s. The militancy of communist-led unions had alarmed them, but most still wanted strong Indonesian unions, if only to increase their own bargaining power with employers. The Suikerbond, the conservative union for European workers in the sugar industry, was one European union well aware that its successful wage campaign in 1920 owed much to support from the sugar factory workers' union, the PFB. Fearing a

[1] *Soeara Chauffeur*, 15 December 1928.

coordinated campaign, the sugar industry bought off the Suikerbond by raising European wages significantly. [2] European labour unions' understanding of the importance of strong unions for Indonesian workers was, though, tempered by fears that competition from the growing number of western-educated Indonesians would sooner or later force down European wages. Strong Indonesian labour unions might hasten the process.

The ambiguities in the relationship between European and Indonesian labour unions became more apparant after the publication of the first report of the Salaries Commission in 1925. The Salaries Commission had been established to restructure public sector wages in order to reduce expenditure. The 1925 report signalled the beginning of a process called 'Indianisation', whereby the number of expatriate Europeans employed by the government would gradually be reduced, replaced by cheaper Indies-born European or Eurasian workers and even cheaper Indonesian labour. In creating a three-tier wages system based on race the Salaries Commission formalised what had in practice long been the norm in the colony. Tier C was for imported European workers and those for whom a European comparable wages should be paid because of their special skills. These wages, it argued, should reflect the standard of living a European would expect in Europe. For Indonesian employees the Salaries Commission established a tier A scale, based on what it called a normal Indonesian standard of living, which it defined as that of the mass of the people. This left the problem of Eurasians and Indies-born Europeans. Its solution was to create a tier B salary scale by adding supplements to the tier A scale. The supplements were on a sliding scale, ranging from 40 per cent for those on a monthly wage below 100 guilders to a flat 120 guilders for those on monthly wages of between 600 and 1,200 guilders. The Commission explicitly stated that the tier B scale was a short-term measure which would ultimately disappear as Indianisation progressed.[3]

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[2] See, discussion in D.M.G. Koch, *Europeesche en Inlandsche Vakbeweging in Indië* (Batavia: 1931) pp. 13–14. See also, J.H. Boeke "Indianisatie", *Koloniale Studien* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1932) pp. 248–264.

[3] For a discussion of the Salaries Commission Report of 1925 see D.M.G. Koch, "De Beteekenis der Schalen in de Nieuwe Salarisregeling", *De Vakbeweging*, 18 December 1926, pp. 156–157. In 1930 the government employed 108,906 people (excluding the railways). There were 8,305 tier C employees paid an average of 588 guilders a month. 8,085 of them were Europeans. Another 16,203 were tier B employees paid an average of 344 guilders a month. 11,153 of them were Europeans. 84,398 workers were employed on tier A wages, paid an average of 52 guilders a month. 84,101 were Indonesians and 229 Chinese. The figures are quoted by Surjopranoto in "Indianisatie", *Orgaan SPGHB,* January 1932, p. 8.

The government's adoption of the Salaries Commission report angered both Indonesian and European labour unions. Indonesian unions were angered by the race-based criteria and by the implication that Indonesian wages should be reduced to 'native' standards. European unions were angered by the stated intention of slowly moving tier B to the level of tier A wages, thereby reducing Eurasian living standards to those of Indonesians.

The Salaries Commission report triggered a renewed debate within European unions as to whether the interests of Eurasian and Indies-born European workers would be best protected by class- or race-based unions. Some of the larger European labour unions were led by social-democrats who had close personal relationships with Indonesian labour union leaders. One of the strongest supporters of Indonesian labour unions was D.M.G. Koch. A Eurasian himself, Koch was a prominent journalist and labour activist who for more than a decade was secretary of the Federation of Public Sector Unions (VVL).[4] He was a passionate advocate of an Indies for all who called it home. For over two years from late 1925 he used the pages of the VVL newspaper, *De Vakbeweging*, to argue that class rather than race should be the basis of a united Indies labour movement. He wanted industry-based unions in the public and private sectors. He accepted that there might be more than one union in an industry, based on the status of workers, but rejected unions based on race. He envisaged these unions coming together into one powerful federation which would be able to challenge the dominance of capital and the influence of capital on the colonial government[5]

Koch argued that it was simplistic to state that membership of European labour unions in the colony was based on race because many had opened their membership to Indonesians who held positions of equal rank to Europeans. He saw the process of Indianisation as inevitably meaning that eventually qualifications would matter far more than race. While he understood European/Eurasian concerns about competition from Indonesians and fears that tier B wages would eventually be reduced to those of tier A, he believed that drawing the barricades around a "white front" was not the answer. Europeans in the colony had to remember that, first and foremost, they were employees and as employees had shared class interests

[4] The VVL was founded in 1918 on the initiative of the union for European workers in the Post Office, the Postbond, and the union for European teachers, the Nederlandsch-Indisch Onderwijzersgenootschap (NIOG). *Soeara Oemoem*, 29 March 1938.

[5] *De Vakbeweging* was published by the VVL in Bandung, with Koch as editor, from August 1925 to December 1927.

with Indonesian employees.[6] They should acknowledge that tier A wages were far too low, particularly for western-educated Indonesians. A united, class-based labour movement would be in a much stronger position to fight to get tier A wages lifted to the same level as tier B, thereby protecting the long-term interests of Eurasians and Indies-born Europeans and at the same time bringing wage justice to Indonesians.[7]

Koch's argument touched a raw nerve. It came at a time when many Eurasians were worrying about their future and the future of their children. While their class interests were mostly aligned with those of western-educated Indonesians, their race interests were not. European labour unions were seen by Eurasian workers as important vehicles to protect their way of life in a society where nationalist political parties and indigenous labour unions were advocating equal rights for Indonesians. They feared that, as increasing numbers of western-educated Indonesians entered the workforce, economic pressures to reduce Eurasian wages to Indonesian levels would inevitably triumph over idealistic views of raising Indonesian wages.

Undeterred, Koch continued to argue that a wage scale based on skill and education levels, irrespective of race, would actually protect Eurasians because it would remove the financial incentive for them to be replaced by Indonesians. It was a reasonable argument, which became more powerful in the Depression years when many Eurasians were replaced by cheaper Indonesian workers. For many in the Eurasian community, though, it raised the issue of how they could maintain their living standards in the face of increasing competition from western-educated Indonesians.[8] Fear of descending into the kampung—a metaphor not just for impoverishment but also for ethnic absorption—had long been a concern in the European community.[9] The conservative Surabaya newspaper, *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad* , bluntly stated that it was absurd to argue that natives should be paid the same as Europeans, as if they had the same living standards. This would substantially increase the living costs of Eurasians, with a conse-

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[6] See, "Eenheid in de Inlandsche Vakbeweging", *De Vakbeweging*, 15 August 1925.

[7] Koch's argument were published in a series of articles in *De Vakbeweging*. See especially: "Nogmaals: Het Blanke Arbeidsfront", 11 December 1926 and "De Beteekenis der Schalen in de Nieuwe Salarisregeling", 18 December 1926. See also, his booklet, *Europeesche and Inlandsche Vakbewging in Indië.*

[8] *Algemeene Indische Handelsblad*, 22 December 1926, Stokvis Collection, No. 208, IISG.

[9] See, Bosma and Raben, *Being Dutch in the Indies* and Ingleson, "Fear of the kampung, fear of unrest: urban unemployment and colonial policy in 1930s Java".

quent decline in their life-style. It was not in their interests. In the view of its editor, Zentgraaff, European employees must form a united front in order to "… maintain the privileged position of European workers in the face of the rising tide of Native workers which threatens to push down wages to Asian living standards."[10]

Koch remained a strong advocate for unions based on the class interests of members, rather than race. He believed that Indonesians who had the same education, carried out the same work and held the same rank as Europeans, should not just be paid the same wages but should also belong to the same union. He acknowledged that some European unions feared that if they encouraged Indonesians to become members they would eventually be swamped by them, but he believed that this was a long-term issue. He was convinced that non-racially based unions were essential for the realisation of his vision of an Indies society "… as a synthesis of western colonial society and native society." He saw labour unions for middle and lower level workers of all races as critical to the creation of a just society.[11]

His critics pointed to the history of the railway workers' union, the VSTP, arguing that once Indonesians had became the majority and taken the leadership they had moved it in the direction of the communists. European unions, they argued, had to be very careful about the principle of equality. It was fine in theory, but in practice would have serious consequences in a colonial society such as the Indies:

> The principle is: equal rights for all. But in practice the question is whether European workers should hold out a hand to Native workers if by doing so their economic interests are threatened.[12]

Koch was a former editor of the relatively liberal newspaper, *Indische Courant*. While sympathetic to his views, the newspaper took him to task, arguing that he must face the reality that every native labour union had quickly moved onto the political terrain. It saw this as entirely understandable because those who sought independence understood the potential power of labour unions as a weapon against the state. However, it was not in the interests of Europeans in the colony:

> We have argued that almost all organisations of Native workers have the inclination—if not the tendency—to use every economic action as a weapon

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[10] *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 13 December 1926. See also, *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 10 December 1926, Stokvis Collection, No. 208, IISG.

[11] *Algemeene Indische Dagblad*, 27 May 1927, Stokvis Collection, No. 208, IISG.

[12] *Indische Courant*, 9 May 1927, Stokvis Collection, No. 208, IISG.

> in the political struggle and that, if the political struggle develops into a race struggle, European workers will rally to the side of their own race.

As long as the Indies was a colony, it argued, Europeans needed their own labour unions. In a colony, it asserted, race solidarity would always take precedence over class solidarity:

> Seeking cooperation with a pure Native organisation will compromise the basis of its own existence, an existence that stands and falls with the colonial nature of this society.
> ... the European employee in this land sees himself firstly as a European and only secondly as an employee[13]

Not all European social-democracts in the colony agreed with Koch. J.E. Stokvis was one prominent voice critical of the idea of trying to create a single Indies labour movement united accross the race divide. He argued that race sentiment and race conflict were the dominant factors in a colonial economy dominated by foreign capital. He foresaw a future where Europeans and Eurasians would come into conflict with Indonesians and be pressured to reduce their living standards to that of the Indonesian middle class. In this situation, he saw a distinct possibility of Eurasians becoming a middle class with tier A salaries. It was not a prospect he relished. Koch responded by arguing that Indies society should be developed so that the general living standard was raised with the consequence that European employees no longer felt threatened. In his view, the fundamental division in the colony was not along racial line, but between those who wanted the development of Indies society and those whose interests were served by the present form of colonial exploitation.[14]

The chairman of the Federation of European Employees, Van Lonkhuyzen, entered the fray in June 1927. A member of the Volksraad and a convinced unionist who was to lead the European officers' union action against the KPM in 1937, Van Lonkhuyzen was a strong supporter of Indonesian labour unions. But he rejected Koch's argument for class-based rather than race-based labour unions. Equal wages for Native and European workers, he stated, could only be achieved in a colonial context by reducing the wages of Europeans. He acknowledged that over time the place of Europeans would inevitably diminish. But this was a long way

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[13] *Indische Courant*, 30 May 1927, Stokvis Collection, No. 208, IISG.
[14] "De Koloniale Vakbeweging", *De Vakbeweging*, 24 October 1925.

away. In the meantime European unions must protect the interests of Europeans.[15]

Koch and a small group of allies were minority voices within the Eurasian community. The race divide could not be bridged. European unions might accept Indonesians as members as long as they were of the same rank, but they could not contemplate Indonesian control. The Europeesche Pandhuisbond was a good example. It was a union for pawnshop managers and deputy managers. By the mid-1920s, Indonesians were beginning to be promoted to these positions and, reflecting the status conscious workplace, sought membership of the European union. The Europeesche Pandhuisbond was sympathetic, condescendingly stating that "… the corps of Native managers and deputy managers consists of calm, level-headed people." But it wanted to ensure European control. Its solution was to allow Indonesian membership, but to change its constitution so that the union executive would always have a European majority.[16]

Railway Workers

The railway workers' union, the VSTP, was banned after the PKI uprisings. At its peak, just before the May 1923 strike, it had about 13,000 members.[17] Membership fell away sharply after the strike, but by April 1926 had been rebuilt to about 8,000.[18] Members were predominantly second class workers in the State Railways in East and West Java, with a smaller number from the private rail and tramway companies of Central and East Java. The thousands of Indonesian railway workers who joined the VSTP experienced a union which listened to their grievances, provided them with a sense of common purpose, and tried to improve their wages and conditions. The collapse of the VSTP after the communist rebellions must have left railway workers' both disenchanted and fearful. Many were interrogated by police

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[15] The speech was reported in full in *Algemeene Indische Handelsblad*, 28 June 1927, Stokvis Collection, No. 208, IISG. In the middle of 1926, Van Lonkhuyzen published a brochure advocating an unemployment scheme for European workers. His concern was that in 1910 there were 3,270 European children born in the colony, all of whom would be seeking work between 1930 and 1935 and that in 1925 there were 6,494 European children born in the colony, which would mean that by 1945 there would be twice as many seeking work as in 1930. He asked where the work was to come from. See, *De SBB*, 1 August 1926, pp. 62–63.

[16] "De Europeesche Pandhuisbond", *De Vakbeweging*, 14 August 1926.

[17] Attorney-General to Governor-General, 2 March 1923, V 1 October 1923 – E 14, NA.

[18] Attorney-General to Governor-General, 6 April 1926, V 1 November 1926 – P17, NA.

or railway managers, some were arrested and jailed, and others were cautioned about further union involvement.

The other major union for railway workers was the Spoorbond. Established in 1918 by European members of the VSTP who were alarmed at what they saw as the radicalisation of the VSTP under the leadership of Semaun, most of its members were Eurasians in the State Railways. By the mid-1920s it had a small number of Indonesian members, reflecting the steady movement of Indonesians into more senior positions. The Spoorbond had watched the growth of the VSTP and had occasionally joined forces to urge railway managements to improve wages and conditions. But the VSTP was far too radical. The Spoorbond was uncomfortable with its communist leadership, it militant rhetoric, and its confrontation with the colonial state.

In the first half of 1927 Spoorbond leaders would have followed the debate in the European press on the future direction of a labour movement in the colony. They were social democracts, committed to unionisation of both Indonesian and European workers. They believed that a strong union for Indonesian railway workers was essential for just wages and conditions. The gap left by the destruction of the VSTP needed to be filled quickly in order not to lose the momentum created by it.

In the middle of 1927 the Bandung central executive of the Spoorbond instructed branches to organise public meetings of State Railways workers in order to create a new union for second class Indonesian workers.[19] The Perhimpunan Beambte Klas 11 Spoor dan Tram di Hindia Belanda (Union for Second Class Rail and Tramway Workers in the Netherlands-Indies—PBST), would be based in Bandung where the Spoorbond could provide oversight as well as support. Dozens of meetings were organised by Spoorbond branches in railway towns throughout Java, many of them on the evenings of 10 and 11 July. The strong turn out at these meetings reflected the fact that many Spoorbond members were managers and supervisors at State Railways workshops and stations and would have had no difficulty in advertising meetings through pamphlets and word of mouth. Each meeting ended with agreement to establish a union branch.

In August 1927 the PBST published the first issue of *Kereta Api*. The editorial emphasised that the new union was very different from the VSTP:

> The union will work along permissible paths which do not bring it into conflict with the laws of the state, in order that all railway and tramway

[19] *Kereta Api*, 15 August 1927.

> workers are able to have a better future, whether in their work or in their social lives. And it will not become involved in politics or religion[20]

Support from the Spoorbond was acknowledged, with PBST leaders emphasising that they intended to work cooperatively with it.[21] Moreover, they pointed out that all executive members were railway workers. In their view, a key reason for the downfall of the VSTP was that its leaders were from outside the industry.

All members of the PBST central executive were middle level employees with the State Railways in Bandung. Its chairman, Wiriaatmadja, was an instructor, and its secretary and treasurer were chief draftsmen.[22] Branch executives were dominated by clerks, conductors and skilled workers. They were the better paid second class Indonesian railway workers, the same people who had dominated VSTP branches. [23] Indeed, many branch leaders of the PBST had held similar posts in the VSTP, but being local rather than central leaders had survived the government's action against the VSTP with warnings about being more careful in the future.

The style and content of *Kereta Api* illustrated the difference between the PBST and the VSTP. There were no articles on overt political matters, no broadsides against the colonial government and no theoretical articles on Marxism. The language was subdued, noticeable for the absence of the class language of VSTP publications. The PBST repeatedly stated that it eschewed political action and wanted cooperation rather than confrontation with railway managements, arguing that this was the only way to gain improvements in wages and conditions. Letters of support from senior managements of the State Railways and the major private railway companies were published in an effort to overcome residual fears among railway workers that the new union would be seen by employers as just like the VSTP.[24] PBST leaders believed that they needed to distance themselves from the VSTP in order to gain the confidence of workers and State Railways

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] *Kereta Api*, February 1929.

The Ponorogo branch established early in 1929 is one example. All members of its executive were employees of the State Railways. Its chairman was a conductor, its vice-chairman, secretary and treasurer were station assistants and its commissioners were four machinists, a conductor, a station assistant and a brakeman.

[24] *Kereta Api*, 15 August 1927. It was not unusual for branch leaders to open meetings by thanking the local State Railways managers for their support. See, for example, *Kereta Api*, August 1928.

management. But they did not disown the VSTP. In articles and speeches they positioned the new union as the heir to the good work that the VSTP had done to improve railway workers' wages and conditions. With railway workers themselves leading the new union, it argued, the good work would continue, while steering clear of confrontation with management and government.[25]

An editorial in *Kereta Api* in October 1928, after once more pointing out that the PBST was not involved with political or religious matters, commented that many people who had yet to become members were saying, "I am unable to become a member of the PBST because the PBST is not yet the PNI." This may have been an indication that there were still railway workers who yearned for the days of the VSTP. The editor's response was firm: the PBST was a labour union whereas the PNI was a political party. PBST members were free to join the PNI if they wished, but the union was managed by railway workers for railway workers and would not itself become involved in political issues: "Of course, we agree with the activities of the PNI and have strong nationalist feelings, but we believe that the PBST is not the place for PNI activities"[26]

The PBST had immediate success. Within six months it had enrolled 3,500 members in 27 branches. Many former members of the VSTP in railway towns and workshops throughout Java transferred their allegiance to the PBST.[27] By the end of 1929 it had 44 branches with 5,172 members.[28] Impressive though this growth was, it represented only a small proportion of the estimated 40,000 Indonesian workers employed in the railway and tramway industry and was less than half the membership of the VSTP at its peak.[29] There was a still a long way to go to overcome railway workers' fears of again becoming involved in a labour union.

A high proportion of PBST members were the more skilled, permanent and higher paid second class Indonesian workers in the State Railways. While the PBST proudly proclaimed that it was a union for all second class Indonesian railway workers, its branches reflected the significant status distinctions within the second class ranks. A clerk or a station assistant did not see a cleaner or a porter as their equal. Nor did a train driver see a

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25 See a survey of the history of the VSTP in *Kereta Api*, March 1929.

26 *Kereta Api*, October 1928.

27 *Algemeene Indische Dagblad*, 23 January 1928.

28 *Kareta Api*, June 1929 and PPO May 1930, in Poeze (ed.), Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten, Vol. 2, 1929-1930. In June 1929 the PBST changed the name of its magazine to *Kareta Api*.

29 *Kareta Api*, January 1930.

stoker or a pointsman as his equal. Status differences among second class personnel was a major barrier to less skilled casual workers joining the union. The low paid monthly- and day-wage labourers who were the bulk of railway workers would not have been comfortable attending union meetings. As well, with wages of between 50 cents and one guilder a day, union dues was money that many of them could not afford to lose.

Members were encouraged to air their grievances at branch meetings and assured that the PBST would be their advocate with managements. Local branches spent much of their time discussing workers' immediate concerns and the union did represent these grievances to managements, regularly reporting back through branch meetings and the pages of *Kereta Api*. Discussions at branch meetings indicate that many members saw the union as an important advocate for the removal of obstacles to Indonesians being promoted to higher ranks. Meeting the expectations of these upwardly mobile members was probably behind the decision of the Bandung branch to organise Dutch language classes.[30] Knowledge of Dutch was a pre-requisite for advancement to the supervisory levels of the State Railways and private lessons were expensive.

Although controlled by the better paid second class railway workers, PBST branches were not oblivious to the plight of the lower paid. One example is the debate at a meeting of the Yogyakarta branch in August 1928. The meeting drew up a list of issues for the central executive to take up with railway management in Bandung. Many concerned the plight of the lowest paid workers. One called for an increase in the minimum daily wage for cleaners from 45 cents to 50 cents and annual increments of five cents to a daily maximum of 75 cents. Another called for a wage increase for coal haulers. Both groups were low paid day-wage workers, many of whom had worked for the State Railways for years. The union was also asked to urge the State Railways to prevent people not employed by it rushing the station platform every time a train came to a stop seeking to carry passengers' luggage. This was portrayed as a threat to the public because of the chaos created, but was more likely an effort to protect the meagre livelihoods of piece-work labourers.[31]

The PBST investigated individual grievances and prepared detailed submissions on wages and conditions. Support from the Spoorbond was im-

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[30] *Kereta Api*, September 1928. Classes were held for one and a half hours, three evening a week. Forty Bandung railway workers immediately enrolled.

[31] *Kereta Api*, October 1928.

portant. The Spoorbond facilitated joint meetings between the chief inspector of the State Railways and the central executives of the two unions. At the first joint meeting in October 1927, PBST chairman Wiriaatmadja asked the chief inspector to recognise the PBST as the representative of second class workers, assuring him that it was a labour union and was not involved in political or religious matters. He also requested free tickets and special leave for union delegates to attend the inaugural general meeting to be held in Bandung in January 1928. Both requests was granted, with the chief inspector stating that he would be happy to respond to letters from the PBST central executive on issues concerning the second class workforce.[32] The State Railways was comfortable with the direction of the new union. After the experience of conflicts with the VSTP, it would have been relieved to deal with a union more moderate in tone and action. It no doubt also felt that the Spoorbond would be a steadying influence on it. Its degree of comfort did not, however, extend to agreeing to collect PBST union fees directly from workers, as it did for the Spoorbond.[33]

At another joint meeting in March 1928 the PBST chairman asked permission to hold union meetings in railway station waiting rooms. This request was also granted. It was a different matter, though, when it came to improving wages and conditions. The chief inspector agreed merely to consider a set of requests. Among these was a request for automatic increments for all second class workers instead of the current practice which was seen as arbitrary local decisions. Other requests included promoting workers to higher levels, or at least paying them an allowance, once they had satisfied all the requirements instead of the current practice of placing their names on a list until a vacancy occurred at the higher level.[34]

One of the first tasks of the PBST was to plead the case of workers re-employed after they had been on strike. It was particularly concerned about those who had been involved in the 1923 railway strike. To no avail. The State Railways reiterated that re-employed strikers would be day-wage workers for six months, after which they might be employed as monthly-wage earners. Only after five years as a monthly-wage earner might they be

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[32] *Kereta Api*, November 1927.

[33] *Kareta Api*, April 1930.

[34] *Kereta Api*, March 1928. The PBST followed up the meeting with a letter detailing specific cases of injustice. One was a station assistant who had passed the examinations to become a sub-station head, but six years later was still awaiting promotion and the higher pay that came with it. Another was a second class draughtsman who had spent time and money to pass the examinations, but was still waiting to be promoted to chief draughtman. *Kereta Api*, May 1928.

given permanency and then only if there were vacancies.[35] Railway workers who had participated in the strikes suffered financially for many years, even if they were re-employed. Not only were day-wage and monthly-wage rates considerably lower than wages paid to permanent employees, but pensions were only paid to permanent workers and were based on years of continuous service.

PBST leaders were well aware that in order to attract and keep members, the union had to offer immediate benefits. In June 1929 it established a death benefits fund and in October a savings fund, an education fund, an unemployment fund and a sickness fund.[36] In late 1929 it started to sell insurance policies to members.[37] It also regularly conducted appeals to support the families of members who died. For example, a warehouse foreman at Probolinggo, East Java, was killed at work, leaving behind a wife and five young children. The union raised the case with the railway management which agreed to pay the widow a pension of 32 guilders and 50 cents a month. A union appeal raised 381 guilders from members, two-thirds of which was used to buy the house in which the family lived.[38]

The growth of the PBST plateaud at the end of 1929. In May that year a clerk in the State Railways at Bandung raised his voice at a union meeting to ask why such little progress had been made. He answered his own question by stating that many ordinary railway workers thought that the PBST was dull and that the frequent statements from its leadership that the union was not like the VSTP and did not want to be involved in politics did nothing to excite their interest.[39] It was a salutary comment. In being so cautious the PBST may have restricted its appeal to railway workers who had experienced the heady days of the VSTP.

In February 1930, on the eve of the Depression, the political intelligence service summed up its assessment of the PBST: "This union has so far stayed away from politics and is loyally disposed towards the authorities and railway management." [40] PBST leaders may have been disappointed that greater numbers of railway workers had not been inspired to join. Perhaps the union was dull, particularly in contrast with the more forthright approach of the VSTP. However, it had established a strong organisational

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35 *Kereta Api*, November 1928.
36 *Kareta Api*, June 1929 and October 1929.
37 See below, pp. 98-99.
38 *Kereta Api*, May 1928.
39 *Kereta Api*, June 1929.
40 PPO February 1930, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

base, done much to represent workers to the State Railways managements and put into place cooperatives and other mutual support funds.

Surjopranoto and Public Sector Unions

The PBST was recognised by State Railways management as the legitimate representative of its lower level Indonesian workers. Elsewhere in the public sector it was often a different story. Many departments and government industries continued to intimidate workers in order to dissuade them from once again joining a union. Management distrust was particularly strong where unions were under the control or influence of Surjopranoto. The colonial government regarded Surjopranoto as radical, unpredictable and irresponsible. It could not forget his leadership of the sugar factory workers' strikes between 1919 and 1921.

Frequently referrred to as 'the strike king'—disparagingly by the Dutch-language press but admiringly by the nationalist and labour press—Surjopranoto was a complex man. A scion of the Yogyakarta royal family, he was a prolific contributor to union magazines and the Indonesian-language press and a powerful public speaker, particularly in Central Java where his royal lineage contributed to his drawing power. He had strong views and was not afraid to express them, sometimes in combatative language. He was admired by many for his energy, his forthrightness and his courage. Others worried that his courage at times bordered on foolhardiness. A veteran of the battle between Sarekat Islam and the PKI for control of both the party and labour unions, from his Yogyakarta base Surjopranoto remained active in public sector unions and, through his involvement with the Partai Sarekat Islam (PSI), influential in its efforts to organise urban workers in the late 1920s. In 1927, he was chairman of the union for forestry workers, the union for opium industry workers, the union for salt industry workers and the union for pawnshop workers, all of which were based in Yogyakarta.

The pawnshop workers' union was Surjopranoto's major union base. He had been its chairman since 1923. Pawnshop workers, like railway workers, had been strongly unionised and had been involved in failed strikes in the early 1920s. On the eve of its 1922 strike the pawnshop workers' union (Perserikatan Pegawei Pegadaian Hindia—PPPH) had more than 5,000 members. Six months later membership had collapsed to 1,200. Many workers lost their jobs as a result of the strike, others were demoted or reduced to

casuals. Pawnshop workers were demoralised by the failure of the strike and lost faith in the union. Internal faction fighting in 1924 and 1925 between the Sarekat Islam-leaning central executive, led by Surjopranoto, and a group of East Java branches led by the PKI-leaning Sosrokardono in Surabaya, further weakened the union. The battle for control left the pawnshop workers' union a much weakened union. It was forced to trim its costs drastically, including selling its printery and abolishing salaries for central executive members.[41] At the beginning of 1927 the union had only 514 financial members in an industry that employed about 6,000 Indonesians.[42]

Union leaders had to find a way to reconnect with pawnshop workers. A referendum of members in 1925 had overwhelmingly endorsed a wages campaign, but the union was too weak to press its case and pawnshop management, realising this, summarily rejected all demands. In an effort to rebuild the union, PPPH leaders took a different approach from that of the new railway workers' union. They decided to revive the stalled wages campaign as a way of tapping into workers' long-standing grievances. It was a risky strategy, reflecting the leadership style of Surjopranoto. Over the next four years the union organised a widespread campaign to improve the wages and conditions of pawnshop workers. In the process it once again came into conflict with the government.

Despite the constant efforts of PPPH leaders to assure pawnshop workers that it was a lawful organisation, concerned solely with improving wages and conditions through peaceful means, the union struggled to persuade them to rejoin. Intimidation of workers was commonplace. Pawnshop managers, local officials and police continually pressured them to stay away from the union, often deliberately linking it to the PKI. The union magazine reported many instances of pawnshop workers who did rejoin being summoned by managers and told that their jobs were in jeopardy. Some who took on leadership positions in a local branch found themselves suddenly transferred to pawnshops far away. Others were harrassed by the police who frequently entered the pawnshops and interrogated workers in order to discover who had joined the union.[43] This constant surveillance

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41 *Doenia Pegadaian*, August 1927.

42 Ibid. The state-owned Pawnshop Service was a large enterprise. Begun in 1901 as a way of providing cheap credit to the Javanese, by 1929 it operated 375 pawnshops in Java and another 84 outside Java. In that year, the peak year before the Depression, 55,936 items were pawned for loans of 207,024 guilders. Between 1904 and 1932 the pawnshop service returned profits of 146 million guilders to the state. See, J.S. Furnivall, *State Pawnshops in Netherlands Indies* (Rangoon: 1935), pp. 5–11.

43 See, for example, *Doenia Pegadaian*, May and June 1928, April 1929.

was intended to impress upon pawnshop workers the dangers involved in union membership and the summary powers that could be used against them by managers and police.

In the face of this intimidation, pawnshop workers only slowly rejoined the union. By the end of 1929 it still had less that 2,000 members, or about one-third of the Indonesian workforce, far fewer than its peak membership of 5,000 in 1922. But the union was once again visibly active with new branches formed and old branches revived as central leaders moved through the towns and cities of Java urging workers to throw off their fears and their lethargy. The union magazine, *Doenia Pegadaian*, was widely distributed to members and non-members alike. A constant theme was that pawnshop workers must stand up for themselves if they wanted to improve their wages and conditions. There was a widespread belief among pawnshop workers that their wages had fallen behind the wages paid to comparable government workers. The union argued that while the wages of assistant teachers and assistant wedana (sub-district heads) had been roughly comparable to those of pawnshop workers in 1910, by the mid-1928 they were paid more than double the wages of pawnshop workers.[44]

Armed with resolutions from its October 1927 Congress the PPPH stepped up its campaign for improved wages.[45] Having failed to get the management of the pawnshop service to negotiate, the Yogyakarta leaders decided again to seek an audience with the Governor-General. Branches were urged to hold meetings to discuss workers' grievances and to report back quickly so that they could be compiled into a brochure. Members were urged to contribute to the cost of producing copies of the brochure for distribution to all pawnshop workers as well as to the cost of sending a delegation to Batavia:

> Colleagues, trust in our own power and stand together in the PPPH, so that we will more easily be able to open the door which leads to an existence more worthy of a human being, and so that our labour, which is responsible for profits of hundreds of millions, is properly valued.[46]

There was a strong response from pawnshop workers. In September, the entire Indonesian workforce at one pawnshop in Central Java signed a

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[44] See the arguments of Surjopranoto at an audience with the Governor-General in March 1928 as reported in *Doenia Pegadaian*, March-April 1928.

[45] *Doenia Pegadaian*, August 1927.

[46] Circular of central executive PPPH, October 1927, enclosed in Resident of Yogyakarta to Governor-General, 20 October 1927, Algemeene Secretarie 1558 Secret, Incoming 27/10/27, ANRI.

telegram to the Governor-General endorsing the union claims and urging him to intervene. Even the Indonesian manager signed, forcing him, under threat of disciplinary action, to defend himself to the head of the pawnshop service, "… I am not a member of the PPPH and I can be trusted: I took part in the request merely to improve my salary and with no ulterior motive."[47]

Despite evidence that the union was reflecting the views of its members, the pawnshop service management continued to deny that pawnshop workers had any genuine grievances. In December the Director of Finance assured the Governor-General that wages and conditions were not as bad as claimed by the PPPH:

> That the requirements of the government pawnshops are not so heavy and the conditions not so bad as the executive of the native pawnshop workers union asserts, can be seen from the large number of inquiries for reinstatement from former pawnshop workers who were dismissed for going on strike and from the large number of young people who present themselves for the pawnshop service entrance exams.[48]

The pawnshops were not seething with discontened workers. In this sense the pawnshop management's assessment was correct. However, pawnshop workers believed that their work was superior to that of many other state employees. They were conscious that they were graduates of the second class native schools, had passed a valuers course and handled money. They were also conscious of the social gulf between themselves and the people who daily brought small items to be pawned. By the early 1920s they were becoming frustrated at their changed career prospects. The pawnshops were no longer expanding and opportunties for advancement were slowing down. By the mid-1920s there was a logjam of pawnshop workers who had passed the examinations for promotion only to have to wait for a vacant position. If not promoted within three year they had to sit the examinations again. For many, promotion was becoming increasingly unlikely.[49] To this sense of frustration was added resentment that Indonesians in many other branches of government service were paid more than they were. For

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47 Manager Mas Sugundo to Head of Pawnshop Service, 14 September 1927, enclosed in Director of Finance to Governor-General, 30 September 1927, Algemeene Secretarie, 31555, Incoming, 6/10/27, ANRI.

48 Director Department of Finance to Governor-General, 20 December 1927, Algemeene Secretarie 434/A1, ANRI

49 Martodiredjo spoke on this theme at the PPPH Congress in February 1929. In earlier years, he said, a pawnshop worker could expect to become a chief cashier or a manager reasonably quickly. Now after 20 years he still remains an assistant. *Doenia Pegadaian*, February 1929.

many, their sense of the importance of their jobs was not matched by the respect received from European managers.

The PPPH Congress in Yogyakarta in February 1928 resolved that the union would produce a pamphlet for distribution to all pawnshop workers emphasising their increased workloads and poor wages. Further, it adopted a motion expressing its disappointment that the Governor-General had so far failed to meet with PPPH leaders. The motion was sent to the Governor-General, the Minister of Colonies, the Volksraad, the Netherlands Parliament and the press, together with a declaration that, if the Governor-General continued to refuse an audience, the PPPH would send a delegation to the Netherlands to plead its case directly to the Minister of Colonies and the Parliament.[50]

The union decision to step up its campaign and to talk of unrest in the pawnshops if its demands were not met clearly caused some members to worry that they might once again be drawn into conflict with the state. In April 1928, the editor of *Doenia Pegadaian* responded to one contributor's fear that union opposition to the pawnshop management might again lead to a strike. He was reassured that "... a strike is disadvantageous to both parties and is only a last resort if the oppression and humiliation can no longer be tolerated."[51] The May and June issues contained numerous reports of local branch meetings addressed by a member of the Yogyakarta central executive, with workers urged to set aside their memories of the failed 1922 strike and again become active members of the union.[52]

The government was alarmed by the direction of the union campaign and worried that it might influence other public sector unions to engage in similar action. It was conscious of the history of the PPPH and of Surjopranoto's earlier leadership of labour unions. Public protests by Yogyakarta pawnshop workers in February and March 1928 only increased its concern. The issue was the dismissal of an assistant cashier on suspicion of theft, despite a police inquiry finding no evidence to support the charge. The Yogyakarta branch of the PPPH established its own inquiry which proclaimed the cashier innocent. A brochure was circulated among workers in all Yogyakarta pawnshops attacking the attitude of management and placing it into the wider context of the union's campaign: "For a long time

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50 *Doenia Pegadaian*, February 1928.
51 *Doenia Pegadaian*, March/April 1928.
52 *Doenia Pegadaian*, May and June 1928.

only oppression has come from the pawnshop managers."[53] The brochure and the public protest meetings resulted in the chairman and secretary of the Yogyakarta branch being interrogated by the police. Rumours flew around the Yogyakarta pawnshops that they too would be dismissed.[54] Instead the chairman was moved to another pawnshop well away from Yogyakarta.[55]

The Governor-General met a PPPH delegation led by Surjopranoto at the end of March. On a number of occasions in the late 1920s and the 1930s Governors-General agreed to meet deputations from Indonesian labour unions. These audiences were a sign of government concerns about the growth of Indonesian unions again. However, while they probably bolstered union leaders' images with members, there were few positive outcomes. Government and union reports on Surjopranoto's audience with Governor-General De Graeff indicate that little was achieved. Surjopranoto was warned about the tone and direction of the union's wages campaign and cautioned that the motion passed by the February Congress was highly improper behaviour from employees of the state. While the Governor-General agreed to have allegations of injustices investigated, and the relative wages of pawnshop workers reviewed, the delegation was bluntly told that it would not get a wage increase.[56]

In July, the head of the pawnshop service again rejected all the union claims, urging that the government pre-empt further unrest by issuing a strong warning to the PPPH to desist from agitating among pawnshop workers:

> ... the very tendentious and sharp way in which opinions are expressed and the totally distorted way in which issues are presented, shows clearly that the real aim of this pretence at loyal action is nothing less than sowing renewed discontent among the personnel[57]

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[53] Quoted in *Sin Po*, 22 March 1928, in *IPO*, 1928/13, p. 624. See also, a report in *Fadjar Asia*, 29 February 1928.

[54] *Sin Po*, 22 March 1928, in *IPO*, 1928/13, p. 624.

[55] "Korban Pergerakan", *Doenia Pegadaian*, May 1928.

[56] A detailed report of the audience is contained in *Doenia Pegadaian*. The editor informed members that the meeting with the Governor-General was proof that if their organisation was strong attention would be paid to them. *Doenia Pegadaian*, March/April 1928. See the official minutes of the meeting in General Secretary to Director of Finance, 4 April 1928, in Brief Gouvernement Secretarie, 10498/28, Afd A1, ANRI.

[57] Head of the Pawnshop Service to Director of Finance, 31 July 1928, Algemeene Secretarie, 1692 Secret, Incoming 26/10/28, ANRI.

PPPH leaders were too far committed to the wages campaign to back away. They feared that if they ceased their agitation they would lose all credibility in the eyes of union members. In September the union distributed another circular to all pawnshop workers. It began by acknowledging that some workers were starting to grumble that the PPPH was a passive union, but argued that its apparent passivity was only because it was waiting for the Governor-General to respond to its demands. It acknowledged that the patience and calm of workers would at some stage give way to more militant feelings:

> Would people rather wait to see the depth of the feelings among workers to improve their lot and demand their rights? If so then they should cast their eyes back to 1922 to see the danger. Events occured then which we absolutely do not want to see again, events that can be seen in the history of all movements. Namely, if improvements to which people believe they have a right cannot be achieved through peaceful means, then their hearts seeth, they finally give up hope of achieving improvements and would rather resort to further action than work any longer under continual humiliation and denial of their rights.

The circular took issue with the government's justification of the existing wage scales on the grounds that pawnshop workers had only completed a second class native school education:

> It is not just, that in setting the salaries of pawnshop workers only their level of education is considered, without any consideration of their heavy duties and great responsibilities.

The circular noted that the government claimed that acceding to their demands would cost one and a half million guilders each year, but neglected to mention that the pawnshop service made an annual profit of 13 million guilders. The profit came from the exertion of workers. Surely, it argued, some of this profit should rightly be returned to them.[58] Union branches were urged to hold meetings to arouse members to action. Surjopranoto and Martodiredjo followed up with a concentrated campaign through Central and East Java between 27 October and 17 November during which hundreds of new members were recruited.[59]

The tone of the September circular was much stronger than previous public pronouncements from the PPPH. Comparing the current situation

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[58] Circular from the central executive of the PPPH to all pawnshop workers, dated 19 September 1928. Algemeene Secretarie, 1692/Secret. Incoming 26/10/28, ANRI.

[59] *Doenia Pegadaian*, November 1928.

in the pawnshops with that just before the 1922 strike was seen as highly provocative by the government and the broader European community. There were calls for Surjopranoto to be arrested and the union banned before unrest again broke out.[60] The pawnshop service management responded with its own circular in an effort to counter the union. Pawnshop workers, it stated, were properly paid in comparison to other government workers.[61] On 1 December the head of the pawnshop service wrote a sharp letter to the PPPH central executive informing them that the Governor-General had rejected its 27 point submission. He concluded his letter with a non-too-veiled threat:

> Moreover, since you have spread these supposed complaints extensively among union members through a brochure whose contents, especially for young workers who are still not knowledgeable about the details of pawnshop regulations, has been a bad influence on the pawnshop personnel, the Governor-General, through this letter, warns you not to continue along these lines but in the future to ensure that all your complaints are accurate. ....
>
> If your central executive does continue along this path then it will be impossible for government departments to have any contact with it.[62]

Undeterred, on 27 December 1928 the PPPH again wrote to the Governor-General reiterating the justness of its wage claims and supporting this with a petition signed by 2,500 workers or about 40 per cent of the total Indonesian workforce.[63]

Again nothing happened. The mood of the February 1929 Congress in Yogyakarta was defiant. Despite the concerted action of the past eighteen months to improve salaries and conditions having achieved little, the Congress reaffirmed the fairness and justice of its arguments and its determination to maintain the campaign.[64] A public meeting on 3 February 1929, called to discuss pawnshop workers demands for wage increases, heard Surjopronoto reassure his audience that the meeting was not a political rally rather it was concerned only with economic matters and the relations between employers and employees. He cautioned, though, that these rela-

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[60] *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 20 November 1928.

[61] Circular by head of the pawnshop service, 8 November 1928, in Brief Algemeene Secretarie, 1/12/28, 2527/28 Afd a1, ANRI.

[62] Head of pawnshop service to central executive of PPPH, 1 December 1928. Enclosed in Besluiten Gouvernement Secretaris, 1 December 1928, 2527/28. Afd a 2, ANRI.

[63] *Doenia Pegadaian* , February 1929

[64] PPO, February 1929, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

tions would inevitably degenerate into a class struggle because neither group would give in.[65]

Surjopranoto's speech was followed by a speech from Reksodiputro which discussed the lessons to be learned from the 1922 strike. Reksodiputro must have been well aware of the risks he was running in linking the current campaign to the 1922 strike, but it was consistent with the mixed signals given by PPPH leaders over the past year as they became increasingly frustrated at the failure of the pawnshop management to make any concessions. Reksodiputro acknowledged his close involvement in the 1922 strike meant that some people were afraid to become members of the PPPH because he was one of its leaders:

> There is no basis for fear because the earlier event [the 1922 strike] was unavoidable owing to the fact that workers at the time resented what they felt was ongoing oppression. Workers themselves wanted a strike because they could no longer tolerate this oppression. They decided to stop work because they believed it was better not to work than to accept unjust treatment. This was the situation faced by the PPPB (now the PPPH) in 1922.
>
> I do not believe that workers now have the same wish to go on strike, and I have done nothing to advocate this.[66]

The February Congress authorised the union executive to step up the campaign for improved wages and conditions by holding a series of regional conferences in West, Central and East Java.[67] The provincial congresses increased the public rhetoric, with workers urged to stand up for their rights. At the East Java provincial congress held in Surabaya in September 1929, Tjokroaminoto, the union patron, urged pawnshop workers to make the union as strong again as it had been before the 1922 strike. He hoped that "… PPPH members are not afraid when they hear the word 'strike'. Every respected nation acknowledges that workers have the right to strike and that the strike is a final action taken by workers to improve their livelihood."[68]

The fifteenth PPPH Congress was held at Yogyakarta from 27 April until 1 May 1930 just a few months after the arrest of PNI leaders and the effective ban on the party. In his opening speech Surjopranoto recalled the long history of the union, going on to explain that while so far the PPPH had been an economic and social organisation it would gradually move onto

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65 Ibid.
66 *Doenia Pegadaian*, February 1929.
67 PPO, February 1929, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.
68 *Doenia Pegadaian*, September 1929.

the political level. This, he argued, was in keeping with the experience of the labour movement in Europe. He spoke of the union's contacts with the NVV in the Netherlands which he believed would bring pawnshop workers grievances to the Netherlands Parliament. He said that the PPPH wanted to set up an office in Europe so that the unfair attitude of employers towards employees in the colony would be publicised.[69] For the moment, though, he acknowledged that there was little more the union could do.

Post Office Workers

The railways and the pawnshops had both been heavily unionised workplaces during the early 1920s. So too had the Post, Telephone, Telegraph and Radio Service. Senior managers and engineers were Europeans with their own unions. Higher and middle level workers were represented by the Postbond, a union dominated by Eurasians. Indonesian unions, open to all Indonesian post office workers irrespective of rank, emerged in the late 1910s in Bandung, Semarang and Surabaya. The most important was the Surabaya-based Sarekat Postel, which had its headquarters in the Surabaya offices of the PKI. When the Sarekat Postel was banned, after the communist uprisings, some middle level Indonesian workers joined the Postbond. However, nationalist sentiment was too strong for them to feel comfortable in a Eurasian-controlled union.[70]

In the latter half of 1928 new unions were created for middle level post office workers: a Midpost Batavia in July, a Midpost Bandung in September and a Midpost Surabaya in October. Labour activist and Volksraad member Suroso was the key person behind the three new unions, working with post office workers in each city. In October 1929 the three separate unions amalgamated into the Midpost (Middelbaar Personeel bij den Post-, Telegraaf-, en Telefoondienst in Nederlandsche-Indië), with Suroso as chairman.[71] The destruction of the PKI and its affiliated unions provided Suroso with the opportunity to nurture new unions and influence them to move in less confrontationist directions. In their quest to rebuild the confidence of

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[69] PPO, April 1930, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

[70] See the editorial in *Het Postblad*, March 1930. The narrative later created was that the *Postbond* refused to publish articles in Malay in its journal and that the former *Sarekat Postel* members felt alienated by what they saw as an arrogant attitude from people whose Dutch was much more fluent than theirs.

[71] "Riwajat Ringkesan 'Midpost'" by Iman Sumantri, secretary of the central executive, *Het Postblad*, November-December 1933, pp. 149–153.

workers in unions, many public sector unions looked to Suroso to become their chairman or adviser. In 1928 Suroso was chairman of the union of public works employees, the union of irrigation and water workers, and the union of state revenue workers. To these he added in 1929 the Midpost and also the association of middle and lower level forestry workers. Having Suroso, a vocal and respected member of the Volksraad, as chairman was more likely to guarantee a union a hearing from managements.

The Midpost accepted only middle level workers as members—'white collar' workers at the level of clerk or above—and was keen to impress upon potential members that it was very different from the Sarekat Postel, which had been dominated by lower level workers and had been under communist leadership. An early edition of its Dutch-language magazine, itself a symbol of middle level status, was heavily critical of the Sarekat Postel, describing articles in its magazine as "… mostly malicious and unworthy articles directed against managers." We now live in very different times, it stated, assuring post office workers that the new union was in the hands of "trustworthy" people:

> … your task now is not to drag the good name of the Midpost through the mud by writing aggressive articles which have the effect of creating a negative reaction. We must not forget that there is plenty of evidence to show that an aggressive approach does not achieve its goals.[72]

The exclusion of lower level workers rankled with Djoko Said, a clerk at the Bandung Post Office and one of the two people who had worked with Suroso to establish the Midpost Bandung. Djoko Said was born in Surabaya and joined the Surabaya Post Office in 1920, before moving to Bandung in 1927.[73] It is not known if he had been a member of the Sarekat Postel, but clearly he expected that the new union he was helping to form would be open to all Indonesian post office workers, like the Sarekat Postel had been, irrespective of rank. Late in 1928 he convened a meeting of lower level post office workers which decided to seek membership of the union. Djoko Said took the request to the Bandung Midpost executive but was rebuffed. Ten years later he recollected that this rebuff had been justified by the demeaning argument that:

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[72] *Het Postblad*, September 1929, p. 56. The Semarang branch was typical. In 1937 it claimed to have enrolled 95 per cent of eligible workers. It had 91 members, of whom 73 were clerks. *Het Postblad*, April 1938.

[73] See, entry in Orang Indonesai jang Terkemoeka di Djawa, p. 449.

> ... it was not possible for a carriage or a cart to be pulled by an elephant and a goat together. In this way, the relationship between middle and lower level workers was compared to that between an elephant and a goat.[74]

As a result, in November 1929, while still an executive member of the Midpost Bandung, Djoko Said formed a separate union for lower level post office workers in Bandung. It adopted the Dutch-language title of Laagpost (lower level postal workers), probably because Djoko Said wanted to avoid any insinuation that it was connected to the Sarekat Postel. The new union quickly enrolled about 200 workers, many of whom were former members of the Sarekat Postel. It organised practical activities, including literacy courses for workers.[75] Djoko Said made one further attempt to create a single industry union for all post office workers, irrespective of race or rank, by proposing to the first Congress of Midpost in April 1930 that it form a federation between itself, the Postbond and the Laagpost.[76] There is no record of a response from the Postbond, but memories of the Sarekat Postel were too fresh in the minds of Midpost leaders for them to agree. Middle and higher level post office workers, stated its magazine, were aware of recent history and were afraid to be associated in any way with lower level workers who had dominated the communist-linked Sarekat Postel.[77]

The Bandung Laagpost was totally dependent on the energies of Djoko Said. It disappeared after an illness in mid-1931 forced him to take leave from work for two years. When he returned to work, in March 1933, he took over as chairman of the Bandung branch of Midpost and chairman of the postal workers' cooperative as well as becoming heavily involved in social organisations providing support to unemployed Bandung workers during the Depression.[78] His vision of creating a new union for lower level workers had to wait until 1937 after the colony had begun to recover from the Depression.

At the same time as the Laagpost was being established in Bandung, another union for lower level post office workers was being created in Surabaya to fill the gap left by the demise of the Sarekat Postel. The Persatuan Sekerdja Post-Telegraaf en Telefoondienst di Indonesia (Union for Workers in the Post-Telegraph and Telephone Service in Indonesia—

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[74] Speech of Djoko Said at a public meeting of the Congress of the PTTR in Bandung, 16 July 1938, *Orgaan PTTR*, August 1938, p. 30.

[75] Ibid., pp. 29–30.

[76] *Het Postblad*, June 1930.

[77] "Sukakah?", *Het Postblad*, June 1930.

[78] Ibid., pp. 29–30.

PSPTT) had loose connections with the Bandung Laagpost. The Depression eventually took its toll on the PSPTT and it too disappeared, probably in late 1933. Some editions of its modest Indonesian-language magazine have survived which provide an insight into a union which, although it claimed to be for all post office workers, was especially conscious of the needs of the lower paid. One member recalled how he had attended a Midpost meeting at which he asked the chairman why the union was for middle level workers only. The chairman answered that middle level workers did not want to be swamped by lower level workers. The writer said that he felt humiliated but, regrettably, the answer was indicative of the class divisions within the post office workforce. He was pleased, he said, to be a member of the PSPTT, a union open to all post office workers, irrespective of rank or education.[79]

Another writer was critical of what he called the "aristocratic" attitude of middle level Indonesian workers towards lower level workers. Ordinary Javanese, he said, had put up with this for more than a thousand years.[80] This "aristocratic" attitude was the theme of an editorial in the December 1931 edition of the PSPTT magazine. It was scathing of the attitude of middle and higher level workers towards lower level workers. [81] Elsewhere a PSPTT member accused Midpost leaders of regarding lower level workers as "masih bodoh" (still stupid) and of assuming that because they were less well educated they were unable to understand how labour unions should work. This attitude he found not just insulting but also untrue.[82] Not that lower level post office workers were themselves free from status consciousness. In 1930, telephonists at the Surabaya PTT were issued with standard uniforms. On going to work wearing the new uniform one telephonist was summonsed by someone who thought he was a security guard. The telephonist was not amused, calling back "I am not a guard, I am a supervising telephonist." Telephonists urged the post offfice to change their uniforms so they would not be confused with menial workers.[83]

The PSPTT was organised by lower level post office workers themselves. None of its leaders were paid. Most seem to have been second class clerks in the central offices of the Surabaya Post Office who worked for the union while in full-time employment. They were well aware that the workers they

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79 Anak Surabaya, "Persatoean", *Soeara PTT*, February 1931, pp. 8–9.
80 "Selfhelp, apakah Egoist???", *Soeara PTT*, March 1931.
81 *Soeara PTT*, December 1931, p. 2.
82 "Mengharap Persatoean", *Het Postblad*, August 1930, pp. 127–128.
83 *Soeara PTT*, September 1931, pp. 5–6.

were targeting—telegram sellers, postal delivery men, office boys, telephonists and the like—had been the backbone of the Sarekat Postel. While seeking to build on the achievements of the Sarekat Postel they reassured workers that the PSPTT was very different. It was a labour union, not a political party, and was concerned only with improving workers' wages and conditions through peaceful representations to management.[84]

Articles in the union's magazine, *Soeara PTT*, tried to educate postal workers about the importance of labour unions, drawing attention to their successes in Europe. When the head of the Surabaya Post Office summoned the chairman and secretary because its journal had published complaints from telegram sellers about the way in which they were treated, the union saw this as a sign of success.[85] When there was a strong labour union, it argued, managements were much less likely to treat workers arbitrarily.[86]

It was a struggle to persuade workers to join and even more of a struggle to persuade them to pay the five cents a month membership fee regularly. The union found it hard to make ends meet, apologising in July 1931 for being unable to produce the June edition of its magazine because of a lack of money. No membership figures are available, but it appears to have enrolled only a few hundred workers.[87] Lower level workers bore the brunt of the redundancies in the post offices during the Depression years, which probably made those who kept their jobs more reluctant to part with five cents a month. The PSPTT did not survive the Depression years, but along with the Bandung Laagpost it kept the spirit of unionism alive and prepared the ground for the emergence of a new union for lower level post office workers once the colony recovered.

The magazines of the Midpost and the PSPTT reflected the strong status divisions within the post office workforce. Midpost leaders acknowledged that many people accused it of being a divisive force in the labour movement with no concern for the interests of lower level workers. This it strongly denied. Critics were reminded that middle and higher level PTT workers were acutely aware of the recent past and were afraid to be linked in any way with the earlier Sarekat Postel, which had been dominated by lower level workers:"The Soeara Postel period was a violent era. This is the reason why there is no desire for working together."[88]

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[84] "Kaum PTT ers Insjaflah", *Soeara PTT*, March 1931.

[85] *Soeara PTT*, March 1931, p. 12.

[86] *Soeara PTT*, April 1931, pp. 1–2.

[87] Speech of Djoko Said at a public meeting of the PTTR Congress in Bandung, 16 July 1938, *Orgaan PTTR*, August 1938, p. 12.

[88] "Sukarkah?", *Het Postblad*, June 1930, p. 86.

The Midpost went its own way. In October 1931, three years after its formation, it claimed a membership of 1,200 in its three branches of Surabaya, Semarang and Bandung. It joined the PVPN, participated in public protests organised by the PVPN and the VVL over the government's economy measures, and established mutual benefit funds such as a savings and credit society and a death benefits fund. In Surabaya it purchased a small property for a 'Midpost Club House', where members could socialise, attend courses and borrow books from its library, which it proudly proclaimed to be the largest library of any Indonesian labour union with a total of 250 books.[89]

The Midpost held regular meetings with post office management during which it raised broad issues of wages and conditions as well as individual workers' grievances. While it did not want lower level workers as members, it was not blind to their needs. This may have reflected Suroso's influence. His public record for over a decade was one of consistent advocacy for lower paid workers. In May 1931, for example, Suroso, wrote to the head of the Post Office raising three major issues: regulations on working hours and rest days; regulations on overtime; and the inconsistent application of regulations on fines. The union argued that the eight-hour day should be reduced to seven and a half hours, because the nature of the work meant that most post office workers were required to work broken shifts. The time and cost involved in travel to and from work twice a day should be compensated by reduced working hours. It also wanted postal workers to be guaranteed one rest day every seven days, as was the case for other government departments, instead of the current practice of one rest day every fourteen days. Finally, it wanted penalties on workers who made mistakes to be applied more consistently and less rigorously, citing the unfairness of a worker who misdirected a letter being fined three hours' wages.[90] There is no record of the effectiveness of the union meetings with post office management, but the union argued that even if it did not get immediate positive responses it was an important pressure group forcing management to be more mindful of workers' interests.

The Midpost was determined to retain its independence, not only from the Laagpost and the PSPTT but also from the union for higher level workers, the Postbond. In mid-1931 the Postbond proposed an amalgamation,

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89 *Het Postblad*, December 1931, p. 181, September 1932, p. 8 and October 1933, p. 3.

90 Suroso (chairman) and Iman Sumantri (secretary) to head, PTT, 2 May 1931, reprinted in *Het Postblad*, August 1931.

arguing that one strong union would be better able to protect the interests of middle level workers. The Midpost rejected the idea, instead suggesting cooperation on issues such as salaries. The response of the Postbond made clear the gulf between European and Indonesian middle level workers. It was particularly concerned about the PVPN 's advocacy of a single salary scale for all except expatriate workers:

> Our conviction that any other way [other than amalgamation] to achieve a powerful common action to advantage PTT workers is impossible, was confirmed by the Solo decision of the Native Labour Union Federation under the leadership of your chairman, which urged a two-tier BBL system ... which of necessity will adversely affect the interests of all tier B government workers, both European and Native, without offering any gains for those on tier A.[91]

The Postbond failed to understand the difference between its membership and that of the Midpost. Whereas an overwhelming majority of Postbond members were Eurasians on tier B salaries, about 90 per cent of Midpost members were Indonesians on tier A salaries.[92] The Midpost was determined not to open its membership to lower level workers, but the economic interests of its members were quite different from those of the Eurasians who dominated the Postbond.

Teachers' Unions

Advocates of the Ethical Policy believed that an expansion of western education to Indonesians was a core task of the colonial government and was the key to the development of the colony. Expansion was slower than many initially envisaged, but even a slower expansion required substantial numbers of new teachers each year. Many teachers, including most head teachers before the Depression, were recruited from the Netherlands and a significant number of local born Europeans were recruited. If these teachers joined a union they joined the Nederlandsch-Indisch Onderwijzersgenootschap (Netherlands Indies Teachers Association—NIOG). However, most teachers were Indonesians. Of the 45,601 teachers employed in government and government subsidised schools in 1933, 41,118 were Indonesians. Many thousands more were employed in private, unsubsidised

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[91] *Het Postblad*, July 1931, p. 96.
[92] *Het Postblad*, August 1931, p. 116.

schools. Teaching was a major occupation for western educated Indonesians.[93]

Teachers were among the first Indonesians to form labour unions. Literate, conscious of their role in creating a new society, and with the organisational ability common to the profession everywhere, Indonesian teachers were active in voluntary organisations and political parties as well as labour unions. Some wanted radical change and became local leaders of Sarekat Rakjat and the PKI in the 1910s and early 1920s. Most, though, were more cautious, concerned not to endanger their employment by the government. As a politically conscious group they were an important constituency and source of local leaders for all nationalist political parties and socio-economic organisations in the last three decades of colonial rule.[94]

The first union for Indonesian teachers was formed in Magelang, Central Java, in 1910. Two years later it transformed itself into the Persatuan Guru Hindia Belanda (Union of Indies Teachers—PGHB) based in Yogyakarta.[95] One of the earliest activities of the PGHB was to establish the Onderlinge Levensverzekering Maatschappij PGHB (PGHB Mutual Life Insurance Company) as a mutual aid organisation for teachers. Insurance policies were sold through advertisements in teacher union magazines and at union meetings, with premiums collected by teachers acting as agents. In 1914, the name was changed to Onderlinge Levensverzekering Maatschappij Bumiputera 1912, and in 1915, as a condition of receiving a subsidy from the colonial government, membership was opened to all government employees and the company managed independently of the PGHB. It was a mutual organisation with annual surpluses re-invested for the benefit of members. It quickly became a vehicle for members' savings and a source of loans to members, secured on their policies, at rates below those offered elsewhere. By the late 1920s, it derived a significant proportion of its income from interest on loans and from investments in property. It had agents throughout Java as well as in Bali, Madura, Sumatra and Ambon, who sold life insurance and sickness insurance policies on a commission basis. It advertised widely in the Indonesian-language press and in union maga-

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93 See, *De School*, 28 July 1933.

94 There is an interesting discussion of the role of village teachers in the organisation of village cooperatives in Margono Djojohadikusumo, *10 Tahun Kooperasi* (Batavia: Balai Pustaka, 1941) pp. 67–69.

95 See, "Riwayat PGHB", *Persatoean Goeroe*, Jubilee Number, 1 March 1933, p. 2.

zines, with unions selling insurance policies direct to members. Its commissions became a useful source of revenue for many unions.[96]

The PGHB aspired to represent all teachers, whether they were teaching in simple village schools or in the elite Dutch-language schools. However, teachers were another group of public sector employees who very status conscious. It was not an homogenous profession. A teacher in a major Dutch-language school in a city did not consider a teacher in a small village school as his equal, nor did a teacher in a normal school an assistant teacher. As a consequence, separate unions emerged for teachers at different levels of schooling, with the PGHB becoming a federation of independent unions. While they had shared views on major issues, such as increasing the education budget, expanding the number of western-type schools and improving the status of teachers, they were divided over others, most notably wage relativities and differential promotion opportunities. The enthusiasm of teacher unions for the federation fluctuated from year to year. Attempts to create a strong federation were also affected by the existence of independent unions for teachers in schools operated by the major municipalities, by the refusal of the expanding Taman Siswa system to allow its teachers to join a union and by the existence of separate unions for teachers in confessional schools operated by the Catholic and Protestant churches.[97]

Originally the PGHB was a unitary organisation, seeing itself as the voice for all teachers, irrespective of level or status. As groups of teachers broke away to form new unions to represent their separate interests the PGHB was forced to recognise that a unitary organisation would leave it as merely one union among many. In 1918 it was restructured as a federation and most of the major teacher unions were persuaded to affiliate. Despite this change, for many years it remained financially and organisationally weak, as the post-war strike waves, the battle between Sarekat Islam and the PKI, and government warnings to teachers against becoming involved in 'radical' politics, drained the membership of teacher unions. By 1925 membership of the five affiliated unions had fallen to less than 2,000 out of a total workforce of over 30,000. Once again the PGHB was restructured. Between 1925 and 1932 the PGHB called itself a "Unie-Federatie", neither a federation

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[96] See, *Sejarah dan Perkembangan Bumiputera 1912, 1912–1982* (Jakarta: Yayasan Dharma Bumiputera, 1982).

[97] The Taman Siswa organisation did not regard teachers as employees nor itself as an employer. Rather they were part of the one family. It therefore considered it inappropriate for its teachers to be members of a union that pitted employees against employers.

nor a unitary body but a middle way, through which it hoped to provide a central voice for the diverse range of teacher unions.[98]

The PGHB saw itself as promoting the industrial interests of members but, equally importantly, promoting the expansion of western education at all levels and improving the quality of that education. Its magazine, *Persatoean Goeroe*, and the magazines of member unions, devoted considerable space to educational issues, ranging from pedagogy to specific subject matter. The status of teachers was a constant topic, with growing concern that teachers' wages were falling behind those of what were seen as equivalent government workers. In opening the first Congress of the new PGHB in 1926, its chairman, Soetopo, spoke of the special responsibilities of teachers and their union:

> There are some who say that the actions of teachers are nothing other that a search for higher wages, despite the fact that we do not ask for more than what is proper and only enough for a simple life. We do not ask to be able to carry out our daily duties using automobiles and other symbols of a luxurious life. We are content if we are able to live a peaceful and simple life, with enough to take care of the health of ourselves and our families. The responsibility of a teacher is to teach.

He was conscious of the responsibility of the union, explaining that the PGHB "… has a responsibilty to inform the public and draw its attention to educational issues. We must became a bridge between government and people on educational matters."[99]

Like all Indonesian unions, the PGHB was implacably opposed to the race-based public sector wages structure. The Hoogere Kweekschoolbond, the union for Indonesian teachers in the Dutch-language primary schools for Indonesians, argued that its members lived a western lifestyle, with similar costs for food, clothing and housing as European teachers working alongside them, yet they were paid on the tier A wages while Europeans were paid the higher tier B rates:

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[98] In 1925 the PGHB had six member unions: the Hoogere Kweekschoolbond, a union for Indonesian teachers in the elite Dutch-language primary schools for Indonesians; the Kweekschoolbond, a union for teachers who had graduated from the Teachers Training Colleges; the Perserikatan School- dan Hoofdschoolopzieners, a union for school principals and inspectors; the Perserikatan Guru Ambachtsschool, a union for teachers at trade schools; the Perserikatan Normaalschool, a union for teachers in the standard Indonesian primary schools; and the Sarekat Guru Bantu, a union for assistant teachers. See, "Riwayat PGHB", *Persatoean Goeroe*, Jubilee Number, 1 March 1933, pp. 1–3. For a discussion of the 'Unie-Federatie' concept see *Persatoean Goeroe*, 1 May 1928.

[99] The speech is printed in *Goeroe*, May 1926, pp. 69–73.

> And now we have the misfortune to be educated in a western direction but be financially classified as tier A. The two are difficult to combine. One of them must be abandoned. There is no other solution[100]

The government was accused of seeing Indonesian teachers simply as teaching machines, "… without any consciousness of our moral and social responsibility." The goals of the Hoogere Kweekschoolbond were simple, "We want and only want: first, higher regard for our diploma and our labour, and second, a future."[101]

Equality with European workers was a common refrain from Indonesian unions. The wage and promotion differences especially rankled with teacher unions because, with the exception of village teachers, their members worked alongside Europeans in school classrooms. An article in the Hoogere Kweekschoolbond magazine in late 1926 argued cogently that Indonesian teachers were always disadvantaged. Whereas, for example, it was easy for a European to attend a head teacher course, only the most talented Indonesians were accepted. Moreover, if a European passed the course he could move to the higher tier C salary whereas the successful Indonesian remained on tier A. It resented the fact that leadership positions in Indonesian education were always filled by Europeans, arguing that it would not be long before the colonial government would no longer be able to afford the cost of imported teachers. It looked forward to this:

> Who should lead the schools? This is not a difficult question to answer. Native students are best taught by people of their own race, who must though possess the necessary qualifications—and competence. In this way, Indonesian education can be emancipated[102]

Unions affiliated to the PGHB grew rapidly from their nadir in 1925. By 1929 the original unions had grown from less than 2,000 members to around 6,000. When in that year the village teachers' union, the Perserikatan Guru Desa, joined the PGHB another 5,000 members were added. By 1931 membership of affiliated unions had grown to 16,700. When membership of teacher unions not affiliated to the PGHB are added, around half of the around 41,000 Indonesian teachers in the public school system were union members.

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[100] *Goeroe*, July 1926, p. 111.

[101] Speech of the chairman of the HKS, Soetopo Adiseputro, to the second Annual Meeting of the HKS held at Solo, 7 April 1926, in *Goeroe*, May 1926, p. 64.

[102] "De beteekenis van de Algemeen Kweekschool voor heden en de toekomst", *Goeroe*, November-December 1926, pp. 186–187.

The numbers were impressive but as with all Indonesian labour unions financial membership was a different matter. In 1929 teacher unions received only about 39 per cent of the membership fees they should have received.[103] A lack of money restricted their activities. Union magazines frequently lamented that unions were less effective than they might be. They looked enviously at the financial strength and lobbying capacity of the NIOG. At a public meeting in May 1929, Ansar, the vice-chairman of the PGHB central executive, asked why conditions for teachers were so bad, class sizes so large and teachers overworked. He argued that it was the fault of teachers themselves:

> Why can conditions like these be imposed on teachers? Because of their weakness, because of their indolence, because they are not active, because they are not united, because they do not understand the value of coming together in a labour union.
>
> The position of the NIOG is different. It is an example for us. Its members are committed to the union. They all support their leaders' actions. Therefore they are not fooled around with and are not humiliated like Indonesian teacher unions.[104]

Teachers, he said, must rely on their own strength if they were to improve their conditions. Far too many remained silent when they should be uniting in strong action:

> Now I pose the question. In the light of our worsening conditions what are we doing? There is nothing, brothers. We do not want to be active, we remain silent. Because of this silence our BBL conditions are rotten. Our status is low.
>
> ... But where is our action, where is our movement? There is nothing, brothers. We are soundly asleep[105]

In November 1927 the Indies government established the Hollandsch-Inlandsche Onderwijs Commissie (Dutch-Native Education Commission—HIOC) to report on the future direction of western lower education for Indonesians and in particular whether the expansion that had occurred since 1900 should be continued.[106] In framing the issues in this way the

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[103] *Persatoean Goeroe*, 1929, p. 3. Fees ranged from 20 cents a month for the poorly paid village teachers in the Perserikatan Guru Desa to 90 cents a month for the better paid teachers in the Kweekschoolbond.

[104] The first part of the speech was published in *Persatoean Goeroe*, 1929, p. 36.

[105] The second part of the speech was published in *Persatoean Goeroe*, 1929, pp. 81–84.

[106] The number of pupils in Dutch-Native schools had increased from 17,789 in 1912 to 58,791 in 1927. The number of graduates had increased from 714 in 1900 to 3,851 in 1927. See, *De H.I.S. in Gevaar!* (Surakarta: PGHB, May 1930), pp. 9 and 13.

government was clearly signalling its intentions. Not surprisingly, the initial Commission reports in 1928 and 1929 expressed concern about unemployment levels among Indonesian graduates from the Dutch-language school system and questioned the continued expansion of the system.

Worried about the trend of the reports the PGHB established its own commission, which published a report at the end of 1928 arguing that, "The Dutch language, which opens doors, which leads to western knowledge, is necessary for our advancement, as much in the social and economic as in the political sense: and possibly also in the cultural sense."[107] Even if the HIOC was correct that there were more graduates from Dutch-Indonesian schools than could be absorbed by employers, in the PGHB view this was no reason to reduce school numbers because education had a social purpose. It acknowledged the importance of fighting unemployment, but argued that there was enormous demand for western education and that if the government did not provide it there would be a growth of private schools over which the government would have much less control. It urged that standards of Dutch-Indonesian schools should be the same as those of the European Lower Schools, that there should be an expansion of Dutch-Indonesian schools in simple buildings and that Indonesian teachers should be employed at all levels, including as head teachers, instead of more costly Europeans.[108]

The final report of the HIOC in 1930 marked a turning point in the colonial state's educational policy. Published just as the Depression was beginning to impact on employment in the colony, it concluded that an increasing number of graduates from the Dutch-Indonesian schools could no longer get suitable employment and that the situation would get worse in the years ahead. Most graduates sought work in the public sector, but it was clear that the public sector could no longer absorb the number of western-educated Indonesians seeking employment. The Commission's solution was for the government to reduce the number of Dutch-Indonesian schools and redirect the educational budget to village schools, where the language of instruction was the local language and the emphasis was on literacy and practical skills.

The PGHB led the opposition not just of teacher unions but of the broader nationalist movement, arguing that "… for a long time some groups

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[107] "Het Standpunt van de H.I.O Commissie van de PGHB ten aanzien van het H.I.O. Vraagstuk", in *Persatoean Goeroe*, Congress Number, December 1928.

[108] Ibid.

have been less than happy as they observe the direction of progress in Indonesia." It quickly published a brochure, *De H.I.S in Gevaar!* (The HIS in danger!) as a rebuttal to the HIOC and marshalled its members to distribute thousands of copies. The brochure was written in Dutch, rather than Indonesian, indicative of the PGHB's conviction that access to a Dutch language education was the only way for young Indonesians to compete with Europeans for higher level jobs. The brochure struck at the heart of the colonial relationship, blaming the high levels of unemployment among young western-educated Indonesians on the racially discriminatory employment practices of government and private employers. Europeans, it stated, had loaded the system against western educated Indonesians[109]

The PGHB organised large protest meetings throughout Java: 800 attended a protest meeting in Cianjur, West Java, and 1,000 attended another in Surabaya.[110] In Solo the PGHB brought 19 local organisations together into a protest group calling itself Badan Alam Perlindungan Anak (Association to Protect the World of the Child).[111] The PGHB insisted that Dutch-Indonesian schools were the foundation for the future of Indonesia. Stopping their expansion would restrict the advancement of the Indonesian people. In its view, it was the government's responsibility to ensure that sufficient jobs were available for graduates, not to cut back on education.[112]

The PGHB campaign aroused the ire of sections of the European press and the praise of the Indonesian press. In the words of one Indonesian newspaper, the HIOC proposals were designed to keep natives "dumb".[113] Another stated that the European press wanted Dutch-Indonesian schools replaced because village schools were cheaper. These people, it asserted, did not want Indonesians to be educated because that would bring greater competition to the labour market and make it more difficult for white

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[109] The brochure argued that: "Large European employers for the most part use European labour as much as possible; only lower level positions, which are beneath Europeans, are given to Indonesians. And the government service itself? It is odd, that there are Indonesian Masters in law, engineers and doctors, still there are no native department heads; there are native pawnshop managers and clerks in the State Railways, but no chief managers or chief clerks. What is the reason for this? Because they are Indonesians as such? In our opinion it is because of the peculiar structure of society in this colony." *De H.I.S. in Gevaar!*, p. 28.

[110] See reports in *Pewart Deli*, 27 June and 7 July 1930, in *IPO*, 1930/28, pp. 116–117.

[111] *Darmokondo*, 14 June 1930, in *IPO*, 1930/25, p. 465.

[112] *Persatoean Goeroe*, 14 May 1930.

[113] *Bintang Timoer*, 13 June 1930, in *IPO*, 1930/25, p. 462.

people to get jobs.[114] The PGHB-led campaign against the recommendations of the HIOC failed to move the colonial government. Public expenditure on education for Indonesians was sharply reduced throughout the 1930s.

Despite leaders' doubts about teachers' commitment to their unions, by the late 1920s the PGHB had become a well organised and financially secure federation of Indonesian teacher unions. Its focus on educational issues and its creation of the insurance company, as well as credit unions and cooperatives at the local level, were a large part of its success. As an organisation it stayed clear of nationalist politics, but its demand for an expansion of public schools and for Indonesians to be the educational leaders in them, reflected the strong nationalist convictions of its members. Throughout the 1930s teacher unions continued their campaign to increase expenditure on public education. They irritated the government not just because of public rallies and incessant criticism in union magazines and newspapers, but more importantly because teachers involved the broader community in their campaign by distributing brochures critical of government policy to parents. It was a long-running grassroots campaign that the government found impossible to repress.

Sarekat Kaum Buruh Indonesia

Surabaya was the colony's industrial city and had been a stronghold of unions connected to the PKI. Many of these unions were for workers in the private sector, including the harbours, the printing industry, the sugar factories and the engineering companies. The first major attempt to organise Surabaya workers in the private sector after the demise of the PKI was the formation of the Sarekat Kaum Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Workers Association—SKBI) in July 1928. The driving force was Marsudi, a twenty seven year old former employee of the Surabaya Post Office. Marsudi was born in Bondowoso, East Java, and while working for the Post Office was an executive member of the Surabaya branch of the PKI, secretary of the Surabaya-based postal workers' union Sarekat Postel and editor of its magazine. In January 1926 he was dismissed by the Post Office, accused of spreading communist propaganda at work. He was arrested in November 1926 but later released, according to the Surabaya Resident because he

[114] *Sin Po*, 6 June 1930, in *IPO*, 1930/2, p. 394.

provided important information to the police which led to the arrest of PKI leaders who had hitherto evaded the police net.[115]

Released from police custody, Marsudi wasted no time in reconnecting with former labour union activists in Surabaya. He established a Comite Sinar Indonesia (Ray of Indonesia Committee), registered a printing company, and prepared once more to organise Surabaya workers. The first move was to publish *Sinar Indonesia*, a broadsheet for Surabaya workers which appeared fortnightly from February 1927 until July 1928.[116] The editor explained that the title 'Sinar Indonesia' had been chosen because of the need to bring light to the darkness and poverty of the people. *Sinar Indonesia*, he stated, intended:

> ... to shed a light on all the grievances and wishes of the people at this time, especially those of workers who have lost their unions because of the severity of the restrictions, with the consequence that they have become mere playthings of employers ....[117]

Those who established *Sinar Indonesia* were well aware that the colonial government was unlikely to overlook their past membership of the PKI and its affiliated unions. Nor were Surabaya workers likely to forget what happened to people labelled communists. An early issue carried a prominent advertisement in which the publishers did their best to disclaim any connection with the communists:

> 'Sinar Indonesia' is not a newspaper owned by any Party, or published by Communists, but is published entirely by the efforts of a group which is truly devoted to the interests of ordinary people and the place of our birth, Indonesia, not following the direction of Communism but PURELY demanding independence for our homeland (Nationalism only). It is published by the 'Pursuing Indonesian Independence' Committee.
>
> In particular, it demands fairness, justice and equality for the Indonesian People with no class differences.[118]

Marsudi had high hopes for *Sinar Indonesia*:

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[115] Resident of Surabaya to Governor of East Java, 20 September 1929, enclosed in V 6 April 1930 – S7, NA. The Surabaya Resident described him as "... an unprincipled, long-standing figure, eager for popularity and therefore always drawn to risky ventures."

[116] *Sinar Indonesia*, 15 May 1927.

[117] *Sinar Indonesia*, 15 February/15 March 1927, in *IPO*, 1927/14, p. 16.

[118] *Sinar Indonesia*, 15 March 1927. Benedict Anderson had drawn attention to the large number of Indonesian newspapers in the 1920s which included images of 'radiant light' in their titles. "A Time of Darkness and a Time of Light" , in Benedict Anderson,*The Spectre of Comparisons. Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 79.

> … we believe that readers of 'Sinar Indonesia', after they have read our call today, will want to tell their friends and people everywhere that in Surabaya there is a newspaper from Young Indonesia which adheres to *Social Nationalism*, that is to say Revolutionary Nationalism, Demanding Honesty, Justice, Equality for People throughout Indonesia, irrespective of class or status, standing on the slogan "Brave because Just'. Fighting against all arbitrary behaviour which contributes to the People's poverty.[119]

Sinar Indonesia stated that it would be a weapon for the destruction of all those who caused difficulties and misery for the lower classes. Lower class workers, especially those in Surabaya, were urged to inform the newspaper of unfair actions by employers so that they could be brought to the attention of the Surabaya public.[120]

For fifteen months the small group which published *Sinar Indonesia* each fortnight struggled to work out how to re-engage with Surabaya workers. They had experience as union activists, having been prominent members of unions connected to the PKI, but now had few resources and no organisation to support them. Apart from regular polemical articles, often from the pen of Marsudi, they relied on reproducing material from other publications, supplemented by reports on the miserable conditions endured by Surabaya workers and occasional interviews with them. Their hesitation in trying to organise Surabaya workers was in part driven by fears of government intervention because of their personal pasts, but in part also by a belief that the arrest of so many political and union activists in early 1927 needed time to recede in workers' memories before there was any chance of them again joining a labour union. It was clear, though, that it was only a matter of time before they moved from propaganda to organisation.

Labour union activity in Surabaya was at its nadir when the SKBI was launched in July 1928. The PNI was pre-occupied with developing a strong organisational structure and on preparing branch leaders, while the Indonesian Study Club in Surabaya was still focussed on social and economic work. The PSI was trying to organise urban workers, but with little success. In July 1928 the SKBI had little real competition in Surabaya. Given that Marsudi was in jail for offending the press laws, Sudjiman was named as interim chairman. Sudjiman, was a commissioner of the newly formed Surabaya branch of the PNI and chief editor of *Sinar Indonesia*, now renamed *Indonesia Bersatoe*. Secretary was Mohamad Abas, a shoe trader in

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[119] *Sinar Indonesia*, 30 June 1927.
[120] *Sinar Indonesia*, 15 March 1927.

Surabaya who had previously been the chairman of the Sarekat Islam Merah (Red Sarekat Islam) at Banjuwangi, East Java. Treasurer was a Surabaya school teacher Sunarjo, a former member of the Sarekat Rakjat (People's Association), former secretary of the union for taxi drivers at Surabaya and former secretary of the union for workers in the electrical industries at Malang. Sudjiman, Abas and Sunarjo were all former members of the PKI, as were two of the five other members of the executive.[121]

Leaders of the Surabaya branch of the PNI and the Indonesian Study Club were initially supportive of the SKBI. Indeed, the new union was launched in the Indonesian Study Club building. The 200 or more people in attendance heard speakers promise that the SKBI would not be silent like existing labour unions but would actively work to improve the destiny of workers, and would eventually become a labour federation encompassing all worker organisations. Somewhat dangerously, Sunarjo argued that the SKBI was a continuation of the Perserikatan Pergerakan Kaum Buruh (PPKB), the labour union federation established in 1919 under the leadership of Semaun.[122] The only difference, he argued, was that the PPKB had been under the leadership of communists whereas the SKBI was under the leadership of nationalists, a dubious argument in the eyes of the government given that all of its leadership had previously been involved with unions linked to the PKI. Sunarjo promised that the SKBI would work to improve workers' wages and conditions and would support them against arbitrary actions from employers. While they were assured that the new union would not become involved in politics, the SKBI flag symbolically linked it to the PKI. The red background with a black hammer and pen under the union name was explained as symbolising the unity of "kasar" (manual) and "halus" (white collar) workers. It was intended to lay claim to the radical labour union tradition in Surabaya.[123]

In September Marsudi was released from jail. He immediately took over as chairman of the SKBI and editor of *Indonesia Bersatoe*. Under his leadership the union presented itself as a radical voice for urban workers, promising to confront employers on their behalf. While Sunarjo had stated that

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[121] Sudjiman was dismissed from the SKBI after only one month. According to an ISDP report he was a known police spy. See, "Rapport van de SKBI" by the ISDP, Batavia, 21 October 1929, p. 15, Stokvis Collection, No. 111–113, IISG.

[122] See, Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*, pp. 127ff.

[123] See reports in PPO, July 1929, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930, and in *Indonesia Bersatoe*, 28 July – 4/11 August 1928. See also, Attorney-General to Governor-General, 15 May 1929, V 30 September 1929 – O19, NA.

the SKBI was a labour union not a political party, he and Marsudi also argued that this did not mean that the SKBI would not be concerned with political issues. In their view to argue that a labour union should not concern itself with political issues was to fly in the face of the realities of colonialism and to deny the essential class conflict in all societies. Not for them the cautiousness of the Bandung-based railway workers' union or the Yogyakarta-based public sector unions.

The statutes and work program of the SKBI reflected the ideological convictions of its leaders. Members were required to accept the organisation's structure of democratic centralism and adhere to the basis principles of the union, which it summarised as "Keadilan, Kebenaran dan Persamaan" (Honesty, Justice and Equality):

> The SKBI party must hold firmly to the hegemony of the worker and peasant class. It must create a dictatorship of the proletariat, based strictly on the principle of the supremacy of the worker and peasant class. The SKBI party aims to achieve an authentic society, with the worker and peasant class freed from being squeezed by either foreign or indigenous capitalism. The SKBI party will support every party, without regard to religion or race, which shares its revolutionary principles and which wants to unite workers and peasants with worker and peasant organisations throughout the world[124]

Surabaya workers did not rush to join the SKBI. In October 1928, three months after its foundation, it had only 75 members. Primary targets were workers in industries in which PKI unions had previously been active, especially the railways, the docks, the engineering worshops and the printing companies. Public meetings were an important part of its strategy for gaining members. They were designed to demonstrate the energy and drive of SKBI leaders and to overcome workers' fears that further involvement in labour unions would only lead to more trouble with employers and police.

At a public meeting in Surabaya on 28 October a large crowd of about 1,500 people heard major speeches from Marsudi and Gunardjo, a former member of the PKI and the Sarekat Rakjat but now a member of the PNI in Surabaya. They reiterated that workers were regarded by employers merely as machines whose job was to create profits. Although Indonesia was a fertile country, its people were poor and hungry.[125] In this, as in most SKBI meetings, speakers linked the union to the history of the Indonesian labour movement and to the radical tradition of Surabaya. Semaun was

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[124] "Werkprogram Kita 'SKBI'", enclosed 1 in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 21 October 1929, V 8 April 1930 – S7, NA.

[125] PPO October 1928, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 1, 1927–1928.

frequently held up as a model. The October meeting, for example, was closed by Mohammad Abas who told his audience that workers' conditions were much worse now than they had been when Semaun led the unions in the 1920s. This constant claim to the legacy of radical Surabaya unionism and the PKI was a dangerous strategy which might have reflected SKBI leaders' fearlessness and convictions but was also guaranteed to test the limits of government tolerance.

It is difficult to get precise figures on the membership growth of the SKBI. It started numbering its membership cards at 1000, in order to give the impression of size, and Surabaya leaders were in the habit of leaving quantities of blank membership cards in towns and cities where they held propaganda meetings. Government reports indicate that at the end of 1928 the SKBI had only 200 members in Surabaya spread over ten industry-based groups: railways and trams; the harbour; taxi drivers; engineering workshops; printeries; peasants; traders; naval workers; coachmen; tailors. These were all industries where PKI-affiliated unions had previously been strong. Branches had been established at Bangil in East Java (under the leadership of a State Railways worker), Cepu in Central Java (targetting workers at the BPM oil refinery), Pekalongan (under the leadership of a local trader), Batavia (under the leadership of a post office clerk), Banjuwangi and Kudus in Central Java (targetting workers at the kretek cigarette factories). An outlying branch was established at Medan in December with Iwa Kusumasumantri, a Netherlands-educated lawyer, its adviser.[126]

As it expanded from its Surabaya base to other towns and cities in Java, SKBI leaders sought support from sympathetic PNI members. Many of the intitial propaganda meetings outside Surabaya were organised by local PNI members and sometimes held in PNI offices. Flyers were circulated in workers' kampung advertising meetings and sympathetic workers were persuaded to spread the word in workplaces. The colonial government was increasingly concerned at the involvement of PNI and Indonesian Study Club members and senior officials were briefed to warn them against becoming too closely connected.

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[126] PPO January 1929 and PPO June 1929, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930. While a student in the Netherlands, Kusumasumantri had been active in radical political groups, including the student nationalist organisation, Perhimpunan Indonesia, the Netherlands Communist Party and the Comintern. He had for a time been chairman of Perhimpunan Indonesia as well as working with Semaun, the exiled PKI and Indonesian labour union leader, as chairman of Sarekat Pegawai Pelabuhan dan Lautan, the Amsterdam based union for Indonesian seamen established in February 1924. On his return to Indonesia he established a solicitors' office in Medan in April 1928.

The radical language of the SKBI and its deliberate claim to the PKI heritage soon began to worry leaders of the major nationalist organisations who were striving to build their organisations within the constraints imposed by the colonial government. It was not long before Surabaya leaders of the Indonesian Study Club and the PNI distanced themselves from the SKBI. Sutomo later privately stated that he had been warned by the Surabaya Political Intelligence Service in late 1928 about associating with the SKBI chairman Marsudi because he was a communist. Marsudi was also suspected by many in Surabaya of being a government spy or an agent provocateur.[127] For his part, Marsudi began openly to attack the Indonesian Study Club, accusing Sutomo of working hand in glove with the government. Reportedly, Marsudi wrote to Sukiman, a prominent leader of the PSI in Yogyakarta and a labour activist in that city, seeking support but was rebuffed, with Sukiman stating that he wanted nothing to do with him because Sutomo had informed him that he was a spy.[128] Dedicated communist or government spy (or conceivably at different times both), by early 1929 Marsudi had lost the initial support he had received from Sutomo, although as late as February PNI Surabaya leaders were still speaking at SKBI meetings.[129]

Rebuffed in Surabaya, Marsudi wrote to Sukarno seeking support from the Bandung-based central executive of the PNI. To no avail. In February 1929, the PNI central executive reviewed its hitherto laissez-faire policy towards members' involvement in independent labour unions in the light of the fact that a PNI member at Banjuwangi had become chairman of the local SKBI branch. This was a serious issue for the PNI. A number of its Surabaya branch leaders were involved with the SKBI, including Sudjiman who had been there from the beginning, the branch secretary, Santoso, and Rahardjo, the branch treasurer.[130] It believed that it was only a matter of

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[127] See, "Rapport van de SKBI" by the ISDP Batavia, 21 October 1929, Stokvis Collection, No. 111–113, IISG, p. 6. Takashi Shiraishi also refers to Marsudi's reputation in Surabaya, stating that "When he was arrested in November 1926, he provided the Surabaya PID with important information which led to the arrest of 'several PKI leaders who had eluded the police till that moment'. He was released as a reward." Takashi Shiraishi, "Policing the phantom underground", *Indonesia*, No. 63 (April 1992), p. 11.

[128] See, "Rapport over the SKBI" by the ISDP Batavia, 21 October 1929, Stokvis Collection, No. 111–113, IISG, p. 16. In an article after the arrest of SKBI leaders, R.P. Singgih, the Yogyakarta PNI leader and close colleague of Sutomo, stated that within Indonesian circles Marsudi was regarded as a police spy. He believed that it was probable that the SKBI was established by Marsudi to act as an agent provocateur. *Timboel*, 15 July 1929.

[129] PPO February 1929, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

[130] Ibid.

time before the government crushed the SKBI because of its overt Marxist language, its constant reference to jailed or exiled PKI leaders and the strong involvement of former PKI members. It did not want to suffer the same fate through association. Branches were told that members could only accept a leadership position in another organisation after first receiving permission from the central executive and that contact with the SKBI was prohibited.[131] While some PNI members ignored the instructions, they distanced the PNI as an organisation from the SKBI.

The SKBI saw itself as a broad-based union for all Indonesian workers. Hitherto, labour unions had been industry-based and, with the important exception of railway workers' unions, with a clear divide between those for government workers and those for workers in the private sector. The SKBI quickly found itself at loggerheads with existing unions which accused it of trying to poach their members. Indeed, the SKBI's strategy was to recruit an individual in a workplace and then support him in a campaign to lure workers away from existing unions. One of the first targets were railway workers in Surabaya who had a long history of union involvement.

The Bandung-based PBST had branches in Surabaya and in railway towns throughout East Java. The SKBI, intent on muscling in on its territory, used its magazine and its meetings to castigate the PBST for its timidity, arguing that it failed to promote the true interests of railway workers. It accused the PBST of working hand in glove with the European railway workers' union, the Spoorbond, and being too close to employers. The PBST retaliated with a stinging attack on the principles and strategy of the SKBI, accusing it of being a divisive and destructive force in the Indonesian labour movement. It defended its quiet, moderate approach, arguing that this had enabled it to negotiate with managements and improve the conditions of railway workers. It was proud of the fact that its leaders were all workers in the industry, contrasting this to the outside people who ran the SKBI.[132]

The SKBI grew steadily rather than spectacularly in the early months of 1929. In March its Surabaya membership was put at 450, with 175 members in the railway and tramway branch, 81 in the harbour workers' branch, 52 in the printing workers' branch, 31 in the traders' branch, 19 in the peasants' branch and 16 in the engineering workers' branch. In May its Surabaya

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131 Ibid. Government reports also referred to the lack of trust between Marsudi and PNI leaders in Bandung.

132 *Kareta Api*, January 1929 and February 1929.

membership was estimated by the government to be 570, and at the end of July no more than 700, of which 617 were in Surabaya.[133]

SKBI leaders got little return for their energetic promotion of the union. Hundreds turned up to public meetings to listen to their message but few committed themselves by joining the union and fewer still paid their membership dues regularly. The overtly Marxist rhetoric and deliberate linking of the union to the PKI must have scared ordinary urban workers. There were also reports in the first half of 1929 of pressure being placed on those suspected of associating with the SKBI. In April 1929, for example, the head of a kampung in Surabaya ordered a stoker working for the State Railways to leave the kampung in which he was renting a room because he was an SKBI propagadist.[134] The kampung head was presumably worried that the police would come into his kampung, bringing trouble not just for the SKBI propagandist.

The SKBI's disdain for social and economic activity also reduced its appeal to workers who were accustomed to unions providing social and economic benefits. Marsudi rejected the idea of unions engaging in mutual benefit activites. In his view, this prevented people from questioning the structure of society that had led to such bad economic conditions for workers. Moreover, he believed that savings funds were of use only to higher paid workers and that this would create barriers between them and middle and lower paid workers.[135] The focus of courses for members was on explaining Marxism and the relationship between capital and labour, and on broadening members vision by discussing the union movement in other countries. The rhetoric of these meetings continued to link the SKBI with the PKI, sometimes in messianic terms. In April 1929, Marsudi reportedly told a 50-strong audience at the SKBI railway and tramway branch in Surabaya that the "strike king" Semaun would soon return to Java and would take over the leadership of the SKBI.[136]

The colonial government had a network of informers inside political parties and labour unions supplying it with a stream of reports on internal

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[133] See, Attorney-General to Governor-General, 21 October 1929, V 8 April 1930 – S7, NA. The Rail and Tramway workers section was under the leadership of Ahjadiredja. Born in Bandung in 1903, Ahjadiredja was resident in Surabaya where he was a first class conductor with the State Railways. See: Uittreksel uit het Register der Besluiten van den Gouverneur-Generaal van Nederlandsch-India, 6 April 1930, and Resident of Surabaya to Governor of East Java, 20 September 1929, in V 8 April 1930 – S7, NA.

[134] *Sendjata Indonesia*, 27 April 1929.

[135] See, comments by Marsudi in *Sinar Indonesia*, 28 February 1927.

[136] PPO, April 1929 in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

deliberations. So concerned was the SKBI that it had been seriously infiltrated that in May 1929 it dismissed four branch and central leaders on suspicion of being government spies. It had good reason to be concerned because the Surabaya political intelligence service did indeed have operatives inside the leadership group as it kept a close watch on the union. As early as April 1929 Charles van der Plas, the Acting Advisor for Native Affairs, concluded that the SKBI was a communist trade union federation, established on the direct or indirect instigation of Moscow. While he conceded that it was poorly organised and had meagre financial resources and, in his view, had a leadership from the second rank, nevertheless he feared what it might become if the intellectuals of the left got involved in it.[137] He therefore urged strong action to restrict or prohibit the organisation. In reviewing the evidence put before him, the Attorney-General agreed that there was irrefutable proof that ideologically the SKBI was moving along the same lines at the banned communists. However, in the light of its actual activities, which he saw as poorly organised and so far not a threat to tranquillity and order, he could see no reason at this stage to go further than keeping a very close eye on it:

> Sarekat Kaum Buruh Indonesia, despite moving along lines laid out by the 3rd International, has not so far engaged in any anti-authority propaganda nor has it made efforts to create a recalcitrant attitude among employees towards employers, so it cannot be argued that at the moment its leaders' activities pose a danger to the maintenance of tranquillity and order.[138]

Unbeknown to the colonial government, on 1 April 1929 Marsudi wrote to the Comintern-controlled League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression seeking membership. On 30 May the Berlin headquarters of the League replied, formally accepting it as a member. The exchange of letters between the SKBI and the League came to the notice of the Surabaya political intelligence service on 16 July, when a spy supplied copies. Batavia was quickly informed and on 26 July house-searches and arrests were ordered of SKBI leaders in Surabaya.[139] The colonial government had consistently made it clear to all Indonesian organisations that direct contact with

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[137] Acting Adviser for Native Affairs to Governor-General, 25 April 1929, V 30 September 1929 – O19, NA.

[138] Attorney-General to Governor-General, 15 May 1929, V30 September 1929 – O19, NA.

[139] Assistant Wedono, Political Intelligence Service Surabaya, Secret Report, 16 July 1929, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 30 July 1929, V30 September 1929 – O19, NA.

the League, or any other Comintern-sponsored body, would not be tolerated.

All may not have been as publicly reported. The Indies Social Democratic Party (ISDP) leader Mollen went to Surabaya in early October in order to speak at length with Sutomo about the SKBI.[140] The meeting was held at Sutomo's home, and was attended by the recently released former secretary and former treasurer of the SKBI. Mollen was told that Marsudi had written to the League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression without informing the SKBI central executive. When the executive found out in early July it was so concerned about the consequences of Marsudi's unilateral action that it decided to try to recover the situation by immediately sending a letter to the League informing it that it had not agreed to join. According to Mollen's informants, the letter was written in Malay, translated into Dutch by the Secretary Sundoro, and given to Gunardjo, Marsudi's right-hand man, for Marsudi to send to the League, presumably after signing it as chairman of the SKBI. The letter was never sent.

As far as the colonial government was concerned, whether or not Marsudi had acted unilaterally was irrelevant. This was an opportunity not only to eradicate a potentially dangerous organisation but at the same time provide a further strong warning to all political parties and labour unions. In carrying out the house-searches the police were ordered to look for any evidence of a direct link between the SKBI and the PNI. Fortunately for the PNI, its executive had realised the dangers of any such connection.[141]

A total of 46 leading SKBI members were arrested on Java, some 25 in Surabaya, 20 in Solo and Yogyakarta and one in Probolinggo. Further arrests were made on the east coast of Sumatra, the most prominent of whom was Iwa Kusumasumantri. Six, including Marsudi, were subsequently interned in Boven Digul[142] Three were members of the Surabaya-based central ex-

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[140] "Rapport over the SKBI", by the ISDP Batavia, 21 October 1929, Stokvis Collection, No. 111–113, IISG, pp. 16 and 18. The ISDP report stated that Sutomo and the Surabaya Study Club people considered Marsudi a spy and that the SKBI executive had urged Marsudi to confront Sutomo and defend himself. Marsudi refused and instead issued a statement which, in part, stated, "According to Dr Sutomo I could be a spy. I will not respond to this accusation because I value the unity of the movement." The report concluded that he was a communist.

[141] Evidence of Sukarno, 6 September 1930, at his trial in Notosutardjo, H.A. (ed.), *Bung Karno dihadapan pengadilan kolonial* (Jakarta: Lembaga Penggali Penghimpun Sedjarah Revolusi Indonesia, 1963), p. 130.

[142] The three from Surabaya were Marsudi, Gunardjo and Ahija Supardi. Marsudi, was 29 years old when interned. Gunardjo, 29 years old, had been employed by the Madura Steam Tram Company, had been a member of the Sarekat Ra'jat and was one of the found-

ecutive and three were members of the Solo branch executive. All had earlier been executive members of PKI-controlled unions and members of the PKI itself. The others were released after some days of questioning, with reports that those employed by the government, primarily railway workers, warned that they must stay away from political organisations in future.[143]

Marsudi was not trusted by other Indonesian political or labour union leaders. Apart from suspecting him of being a spy, at a deeper level they considered him poorly educated, opportunistic, hot-headed and too closely attached to the language and the ideology of the PKI. They had no regrets when the government arrested him and closed down the SKBI. In the Volksraad Suroso described Marsudi in unflattering terms as "… a murky figure for nationalists." He said that he was not the only nationalist bemused at the government allowing Marsudi to go free after the communist uprisings:

> What I find incomprehensible, is the attitude of the government towards Marsudi, who was regarded by it as an old communist. There are many ordinary people, farmers in villages, who were sent to Digul because they were considered dangerous to their neighbourhood, while Marsudi, who for his neighbourhood is perhaps a hundred time more dangerous than ordinary people, was allowed to go free and continue his activities.[144]

The SKBI claimed that it was a labour union not a political party. In reality it was a hybrid, as much interested in politics as it was in organising urban workers. In practice it was not a militant union. It neither organised nor advocated strikes nor did it advocate the overthrow of the colonial govern-

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ers of the SKBI. Ahija Supardi, 27 years old, was a first class conductor with the State Railways in Surabaya and chairman of the railway and tramway branch of the SKBI. Gunardjo was a member of the Surabaya branch of the PNI.

The three from Solo were Muljono, Sadino and Sumokasdiro. Muljono, 28 years old, had been a leading member of the PKI and the Sarekat Rakjat in Kediri for which activity he had been jailed a number of times. At the time of the PKI uprising in November 1926 he was in Cipinang jail. On his release in August 1928 he moved to Yogyakarta. He became the leader of the SKBI in Yogyakarta and a member of the SKBI Central Java regional council. Sadino Martopuspito, 21 years old, was a clothing trader in Solo who had earlier been a propagandist for the Sarekat Ra'jat before becoming an SKBI propagandist. Sumokasdiro, 27 years old, was a former conductor with the Sister Societies in Solo and former secretary of the Solo branch of the VSTP before becoming a propagandist for the Solo branch of the SKBI. Both Muljono and Sadino were also members of the PNI in Solo.

See detailed documentation in V 8 April 1930 – S7, NA. See also, Uittreksel uit het Register der Besluiten van den Gouverneur-Generaal van N.I,. No. 2, 26 February 1930, Secret Mail Report 1930/218 and Uittreksel uit het Register der Besluiten van den Gouverneur-Generaal van N.I., No. 1, 22 October 1930, Secret Mail Report 1930/1051, NA.

143 See, "Rapport over the SKBI" by the ISDP Batavia, 21 October 1929, and enclosures, Stokvis Collection, No. 111–113, IISG.

144 Quoted in *Het Postblad*, September 1929, p. 57.

ment with violence. It saw itself as continuing the radical tradition of labour unions in Surabaya and its leaders' rhetoric had barely changed from that of the early 1920s. It posed no immediate threat to the state and, despite the energy of its leaders, few Surabaya workers trusted it enough to join. There was, however, an inevitability about its demise. Only the timing was uncertain. Takashi Shiraishi has rightly argued that a large part of the government's intent on arresting SKBI leaders was to intimidate urban workers and to mark the narrow limits of allowable activity.[145] It was a lesson not lost on the intellectual elite who led the political parties and the labour unions.

Political Parties and Labour Unions

In 1927 the two main political parties were the long established Partai Sarekat Islam (PSI) and the newly formed Indonesian Nationalist Association (PNI). Both were urban parties, with memberships predominantly in Java. Many active branch members were state employees, such as teachers, railway workers and administrative workers, the very people who were likely also to be members of the major unions. Neither party had the ideological commitment of the PKI to organise urban workers. However, both realised that the destruction of the PKI provided opportunities to increase their influence and membership among urban workers. In Bandung, Batavia and especially in the former PKI union stronghold of Surabaya, they created competing unions to attract urban workers. From the middle of 1929 the competition was increased after the Indonesian Study Club in Surabaya moved into labour activity.

In the late 1910s and the early 1920s the Yogyakarta-based leaders of the Sarekat Islam had led major unions for public sector workers. However, in Surabaya Sarekat Islam had been outflanked by the communists in organising privately employed workers. In 1927 PSI leaders in Surabaya made another attempt to organise among Surabaya workers. The first tentative move was in March 1927 with the formation of the Persatuan Chauffeur, a union for taxi drivers and privately employed drivers. The PSI hoped to get

[145] Takashi Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground". The Indonesian Study Club newspaper, *Soeloeh Ra'jat Indonesia*, reported that there had been extensive newspaper reports that communists throughout the world planned to organize strikes on 1 August. The reports had spread by word of mouth into the Surabaya kampung and, coming on top of the SKBI arrests, had caused some fear among kampung residents as 1 August approached. *Soeloeh Ra'jat Indonesia*, 14 August 1929.

support from those who had earlier been members of the Chauffeur Bond Indonesia, which had been led by Surabaya PKI members, and to build on this to create unions for workers in other industries. Despite 100 people attending the inaugural meeting, the Persatuan Chauffeur failed to persuade Surabaya drivers to join.

The formation of the SKBI in July 1928 was seen by PSI leaders in Surabaya as a direct threat to their ambitions, reviving fears of yet again being sidelined while others organised Surabaya workers. On 28 October it responded by re-launching the Persatuan Chauffeur and redoubling its efforts to persuade drivers to join. The chairman of the Surabaya branch of the PSI, Wondosudirdjo, took over as chairman of the union in order to provide new leadership. He acknowledged that hitherto drivers had been too frightened to join but assured his listeners that it was a labour union solely concerned with the assisting drivers to improve their conditions.

There were more than 6,000 taxi driver in Surabaya in 1928.[146] They had many grievances. They complained of arbitrary treatment from the Surabaya police, including abusive language, and of being regularly booked for transgressing regulations that they did not understand because they were in Dutch. Moreover, they complained of daily arrests for minor offences, such as having a broken light, speeding or using the horn too frequently, and of being fined or even imprisoned by the Courts without being able to defend themselves properly because Court proceedings were beyond their understanding.[147] Realising that to attract workers the union had to address their day-to-day issues, Wondosudirdjo announced that the union would establish an office in Surabaya where drivers could bring their grievances and promised that the union would represent drivers treated arbitrarily by police or employers. He also promised that the union would create cooperatives and run practical courses for drivers.[148]

Persatuan Chauffeur was far more succesful in attracting Surabaya drivers than its rival, the SKBI, largely because of its strategy of providing solutions to drivers' day-to-day issues. The SKBI disdained such activity. By March 1929 the Surabaya branch alone had about 300 members and branches had been established in the East Java towns of Madiun and Pasuruan.[149] By August the union had spread to Yogyakarta in Central Java

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146 *Soeara Chauffeur*, 15 December 1928.

147 See, *Fadjar Asia*, 12 March 1929 and Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p. 5.

148 See, *Soeara Chauffeur*, 15 December 1928 and a report in PPO March 1927, October 1928, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 1, 1927–1928.

149 *Fadjar Asia*, 12 March 1929.

and to Batavia. The union gradually broadened the range of services offered to members. A death benefits fund and an insurance arm were established and, after the union moved into its own rented offices in Surabaya in February 1929, it provided free legal advice to members and support in reporting arbitrary treatment by police.[150] It also established literacy courses three evening a weeks as well as courses on social, economic and religious issues. Sporting and cultural programs were also developed and the PSI women's auxiliary offered weekly religious classes for the wives of union members. This was one of the very few examples in PSI unions when the religious base of the parent was apparent[151]

Persatuan Chauffeur appealed to workers' in the same terms as other unions. There was no attempt to clothe its appeal in religious language or symbols. In February 1929 the union published the first issue of its magazine, *Soeara Chauffeur*. Only two issues have survived. Their moderate tone was in sharp contrast to the magazines published by the SKBI. The only references to religion were advertisements for a book of sermons and two books on Islam and social issues for sale at the union office, and an article on personal morality in the context of the values of Islam as well as other religions. There were no complex, ideology-laden articles, only simple reporting on the poor conditions of Surabaya drivers and explanations of how the union could help. Drivers were promised that Persatuan Chauffeur "… will work to improve the livelihood of its members through peaceful ways and not through ways that are reckless."[152] They were proudly advised that the union had already leased two petrol stations in Surabaya. Not only would profits support the union but drivers who produced a union membership card would receive vouchers for petrol purchases which could be redeemed for cash at the union offices.[153]

Drivers were, of course, made aware of the union's PSI links. Photographs of national heroes and symbols such as the PSI flag were prominently displayed at public meetings, in part to reassure drivers that it was not a 'red' organisation but in part also as a recruitment exercise for the PSI.[154]

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150 *Fadjar Asia*, 12 March 1929.

151 *Fadjar Asia*, 14 February and 26 March 1929.

152 *Soeara Chauffeur*, 15 December 1928.

153 *Soeloeh Ra'jat Indonesia*, 5 December 1928 and *Soeara Chauffeur*, 15 December 1928.

154 At a meeting in February 1929 to celebrate moving into its own building in Surabaya, a portrait of the Persatuan Chauffeur chairman Wondosudirdjo was set alongside portraits of Diponogoro and Tjokroaminoto. The room was decorated in the PSI colours of red and green. A jazz band and a gamelan were part of the evening's entertainment. The building was rented for 100 guilders a month. *Fadjar Asia*, 6 February 1929.

But the focus was on workers' immediate concerns, and persuading them that they had nothing to fear by joining the union. A public meeting on 4 April, for example, was attended by about 200 people, mostly Surabaya drivers. They heard Wondosudirdjo affirm the moderate nature of the union. He wanted no-one to confuse the Persatuan Chauffeur with the SKBI. The Persatuan Chauffeur, he stated, did not exagerate the differences between employers and workers, rather it worked towards harmony while at the same time defending workers' living standards.[155]

An even larger number of people attended a public meeting in Surabaya on 28 July. The fifteen hundred strong crowd heard Wondosudirdjo again speak about the arbitrary attitude of police towards drivers which resulted in hundreds of them being fined each year. In a sign of the intense competition among taxi drivers Wondosudirdjo expressed concern that many taxi drivers were willing to work for less than the minimum fare of 40 cents and 20 cents a kilometer. He called on members not to undercut each other but to stand together in demanding the legal minimum fare of 40 cents and if customers refused to pay to report the incident to the police.[156]

In September 1929 the Persatuan Chauffeur had ten branches throughout Java and three outside Java, at Makassar and Pare Pare, in Sulawesi, and Palembang in Sumatra. Despite its expansion and the large numbers who turned up to public meetings, it encountered the same problem as earlier labour unions. Workers joined, but failed to pay their membership fees regularly. For a taxi driver, the joining fee of two guilders was a lot of money. Many were reluctant to part with a further 50 cents a month despite the union's promise of support for their immediate issues. Financial weakness was a major problem for the union. It also lacked good local leadership. Wondosudirdjo made a propaganda trip through East Java in July 1929, but while he reported to his central executive that there was a lot of interest in the union he stated that he had been unable to create new branches because of a lack of suitable local leaders.[157]

Efforts by the Surabaya leaders of the PSI to organise privately employed workers in Surabaya were threatened from the middle of 1929 by the deci-

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155 *Fadjar Asia*, 8 and 9 April 1929. On 17 May the chairman and secretary of Persatuan Chauffeur were summoned by the head of the Political Intelligence Service in Surabaya. The PID Head stated that section heads of the police service had been instructed to warn police against arbitrary behaviour towards drivers and especially against bad language. The Persatuan Chauffeur duly reported this to members as an example of the benefits flowing from drivers working together to promote their interests. *Fadjar Asia*, 24 May 1929.

156 *Fadjar Asia*, 2 August 1929.

157 PPO May 1929, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

sions of the PNI and the Indonesian Study Club to move into organising urban workers. Relations between the PSI in Surabaya and the Indonesian Study Club had never been good. Prominent members of the Indonesian Study Club had little time for the religion-based PSI and PSI leaders took offence at what they saw as the aggressive anti-Islam views of the Indonesian Study Club. The PSI was in decline throughout the colony, unable to revive itself in the face of the emergent PNI. The PSI had reluctantly joined the federation of Indonesian political parties, the PPPKI, but was a constant critic of it.[158]

In this context the PSI tried to steal a march on the PNI and the Indonesian Study Club by asking one of its key leaders, Agus Salim, to make representations on its behalf to the Netherlands Federation of Labour Unions (NVV). Salim was in Europe on a mission funded by the pawnshop workers' union to promote its wages campaign to the Netherlands Parliament and Netherlands labour unions. Salim duly wrote to the NVV executive seeking assistance for the Indonesian labour movement through financial support of *Fadjar Asia*, a newspaper edited by Tjokroaminoto and himself in Batavia. *Fadjar Asia* was struggling financially and the PSI was in no position to subsidise it. Salim carefully described the newspaper as a voice for the Indonesian worker, avoiding mention of its PSI links. The NVV cautiously sought advice from the Indies Social Democratic Party (ISDP). The ISDP response was clear. It welcomed the prospect of NVV support for the Indonesian labour movement but advised against funding *Fadjar Asia*. It was critical of the PSI and PSI-led unions, arguing that the younger western-educated generation of nationalists had no time for political parties based on religion. NVV support for *Fadjar Asia*, and by implication the PSI, it argued, would be used by Salim and Tjokroaminoto as a weapon in their campaign against the PPPKI. The NVV was advised to support the Indonesian labour movement through the PPPKI and the labour union federation it was in the process of creating. It could also channel any support through the ISDP. The NVV accepted this advice, advising Salim that it regretted that at this time it could not provide the support requested.[159] The opportunist move by the PSI failed and *Fadjar Asia* ceased publication at the end of 1930.

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158 Ingleson, *Road to Exile*, pp. 69–74.

159 See, J. van Gelderen (in the name of the executive of the ISDP) to the NVV executive, 20 October 1929 and chairman of the NVV daily executive (E. Kupers) to members of the NVV executive, 13 November 1929, Stokvis Collection, No. 305–308, IISG.

While the PSI was trying to organise urban workers from 1927, the PNI moved more slowly. Its first task was to develop an organisational structure and through public meetings, publications and educational programs, shake off people's fears of again becoming involved in political activity. A branch was set up in Batavia in November 1927, another in Surabaya in February 1928, both under the leadership of people who had been involved in the formation of the party in Bandung. The Netherlands-educated lawyer Sartono had moved to Batavia, where he established a legal firm and the Bandung-educated architect Anwari had moved to Surabaya, where he had a job with a major architectural firm.[160] Through 1928 these three core branches worked to recruit and educate a cadre who could lead the party in a disciplined way in order to avoid intervention from the colonial government.

At the begining of 1929 the PNI was confident that its organisational structure was strong enough to enable it to extend its activities into organising labour unions. Its secretary, Gatot Mangkupradja, had already accepted the position as secretary of the Bandung-based railway workers' union, the PBST. From July 1928 he had edited the PBST magazine, noticeably introducing articles critical of the government. The government's 1929 Budget came in for particular criticism, especially its appointment of a former director of finance to drive its economy measures. The sharper tone Gatot brought to the union magazine and union meetings caused some disquiet within a PBST leadership worried about being associated with a political party. The PNI decision to move into labour union activity brought the disquiet to a head. Gatot resigned his PBST position in January 1929, citing possible conflicts of interest between his union work and his political activity. The PBST reverted to appointing a railway worker in his stead.[161]

Gatot was a key speaker at the second Congress of the PNI held in Batavia in May 1929. His theme was the need to create a strong and united labour movement. He gave a sombre account of the poverty of the Indonesian people as a consequence of 300 years of imperialism, going on to tell his audience that he was a strong advocate for Indonesian labour unions but that in a colony they could only improve the people's welfare and bring an

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[160] Sartono opened a solicitor's office in Batavia together with three other Netherlands-educated lawyers and political activists, Iskaq, Budiardjo and Sunarjo. The secretariat of the PNI branch in Batavia was located in these legal offices. See, PPO, October 1927 and November 1927, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 1, 1927–1928.

[161] See, *Kereta Api*, July 1928 and January 1929. See also, Gatot's article, "Bezuinigings dictator", *Kereta Api*, December 1928.

end to capitalism if they had strong fighting funds. Moreover, he argued that leadership should be in the hands of independent people who were not afraid of being dismissed from their jobs because of their union activism. While they were an essential part of the whole movement to obtain a free Indonesia it was his view that they should be separate organisationally from political parties. [162]

These were Gatot's personal views. The Bandung branch held a different view on the relationship between labour unions and the party from the leaderships in Batavia and Surabaya. Under Sukarno's influence, Bandung wanted a close connection between labour unions and nationalist parties. Under Sartono's influence Batavia was more cautious, as was Surabaya under Anwari's influence. While agreeing that the PNI should create unions, and that its members should influence their activities, they wanted unions to operate separately from the party so that the government could not accuse them of mixing labour unions and politics.[163] Each branch went its own way. In early 1929 party members were informed of plans to establish unions for private sector workers and eventually to create a labour union federation. Sukarno began to refer in his speeches to the importance of labour unions to the political movement because they worked to destroy capitalism and thereby weaken imperialism. At the same time, perhaps concerned about the direction being taken by the SKBI in Surabaya, and also aware that in the past local union leaders had often been outside the control of central leaders, he insisted that the PNI develop courses for potential leaders before it created unions.[164]

By the middle of 1929 the PNI, with well established branches in the major cities of Java, took its first tentative steps towards organising urban workers. In June, a union was established for drivers in Bandung and another for harbour workers at the Batavian port of Tanjung Priok. In July, a general union was formed for tradesmen in Batavia.[165] The PNI's moves to organise workers in Surabaya was led by Rahardjo, a commissioner in the PNI Surabaya branch and a member of the Indonesian Study Club. In August 1929, he was behind the establishment of a union for male house work-

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[162] See report in PPO May 1929, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

[163] PPO, June 1929, and PPO, August 1929, in Ibid.

[164] PPO June 1929, in Ibid.

[165] PPO June and July 1929 in Ibid.

ers. About 150 Surabayan men came to its inaugural meeting.[166] In April 1930, he established a union for workers in the Surabaya clothing industry. Again the initial meeting was held in the Study Club building and was attended by about 90 workers in the clothing industry.[167] These PNI-connected unions constantly impressed upon workers that they were quite distinct from political parties and were focussed on improving wages and conditions.

The Indonesian Study Club and Labour Unions

There was strong cooperation between the Surabaya leaders of the PNI and the Indonesian Study Club in the organisation of Surabaya workers. Most PNI leaders were simultaneously members of the Study Club, and the Study Club building was frequently the venue for public meetings of PNI-connected unions. In the close circle of the Surabaya political elite, it was often difficult to separate PNI and Study Club labour union activities.[168]

The Indonesian Study Club was the major organisation for politically conscious Indonesians in Surabaya. Founded on 11 July 1924, its prime mover was Sutomo, a Surabaya doctor and teacher at the local medical school who, while in Amsterdam between 1919 and 1923, had been a member of the Indonesian students' organisation, Perhimpunan Indonesia. It was not a large organisation. It probably never had more than 150 members.[169] However, its influence was far greater than its membership figures might suggest, because so many of its members were active in political parties, labour unions and social and economic organisations in Surabaya.[170]

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166 PPO, August 1929 in Ibid.

167 PPO, April 1930, in Ibid.

168 Take the example of Ruslan Wongsokusumo. Ruslan was born in 1910 in Madura. He worked as a postal assistant at the Surabaya Post Office, then as a bookkeeper with the NHM in Surabaya and later as a bookkeeper with Japanese companies in Surabaya. In May 1930 he was chairman of the PSSI central executive, chairman of three affiliated unions. a commissioner of the PNI Surabaya branch and a prominent member of the Indonesian Study Club. He was also the chairman of the National Night Market (pasar malam nasional) committee in Surabaya in the 1930s and when the PBI established schools from 1932 he was again deeply involved.

169 *Soeloeh Indonesia*, December 1926, in *IPO*, 1927/1, pp. 14–15.

170 In a survey of the political situation prepared for the Internal Administration Conference of 1929, the Study Club was described as encompassing people from the 'extreme right', such as the Surabaya Municpal Councillor Subroto, to the 'extreme left', such as Anwari. It argued that "This may lead to undesirable consequences in the future, for

The impact of the Indonesian Study Club can be guaged from a snapshot of its activities in 1930. In that year it operated schools, a women's refuge and an orphanage. It held regular literacy courses and owned a printery which employed 21 workers to produce a weekly magazine in Dutch and a thrice weekly popular newspaper in Javanese as well as pamphlets and brochures. Its complaints bureau had handled 151 individual cases in 1929, many of them involving Surabaya workers and their employers. It had begun creating savings and loans coperatives in Surabaya. It had established the Indonesian National Bank as a joint stock company. In 1929, the bank loaned 95,547 guilders to 368 people. In the 1930s the Indonesian National Bank became a large and successful commercial enterprise. The Indonesian Study Club was the major forum in the city for Dutch-speaking intellectuals, with its buildings used by Surabaya organisations, from political parties to religious groups.[171]

Sutomo was the dominant figure in the Indonesian Study Club. His years studying in the Netherlands and his marriage to a Dutch woman deeply influenced his view of Indonesia. He moved as easily in the ideas, ideologies, cultures and literatures of the West as he did in the world of Javanese literature, mysticism and cultural forms. He combined a deep respect for Javanese traditions and values with a strong sense of the obligation of those who had a western education and a privileged social position to serve their society. Like Suroso, a friend and a person with whom he shared many values and political ideas, he rejected ostentation in manners or lifestyle.

Sutomo has rightly been described as a man who believed deeply in the maintenance of a harmonious society where the less educated, whether urban workers or rural farmers, should be led by the western-educated elite. In Sutomo's view, this entitlement to leadership entailed a responsibility to lead the masses in the same way as a father had an obligation to lead his children. He sometimes used the imagery of a Javanese gamelan where harmony depended on individual players sticking to their defined roles.[172]

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example the Study Club could form a bridge between radicals and moderates across which the PNI will be able to penetrate more moderate organisations." Overzicht van de Inwendigen Politieken Toestand van Maart 1928 tot December 1928, Bestuurconferencie 1929, ANRI.

171 See a detailed report in "Verzorging van geestelijke behoeften en sociale welvaartszorg uit Inlandschen kring", enclosed in Adviser for Native Affairs to Governor-General, 2 May 1930, Mail Report 1930/856, NA.

172 There is as yet no full scale biography of Sutomo. The most extensive study is Savitri Scherer, *Keselarasan dan Kejanggalan. Pemikiran-pemikiran Priayi Nasionalis Jawa Awal Abad XX* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1985) and "Sutomo and Trade Unionism", *Indonesia*, No.

These are important strands to Sutomo's world view and political position. But there are other strands in the character and thinking of one of the most influential figures in the colonial political and labour movements. Sutomo's calm exterior and lack of ostentation was accompanied by a sharp pen and argumentative speaking style. He was not averse to vigorous public debate. He was, after all, an astute and effective politician. While rejecting class struggle, he was deeply influenced by Marxist ideas on the need to empower workers, not just to change their own lives but also to change the structures of their society. He recognised that Indonesia needed deep social and economic change in order to lift its people from poverty and understood the politics of power. But change had to be carefully managed. His opposition to the politics of class struggle reflected a fear of disorder, and even violence, both of which were anathema to him.

He was critical of the impact of foreign capitalism on Indonesia but, unlike people such as Sjahrir and Sukarno, was not opposed to indigenous capitalism. More so than most nationalists at the time, he incorporated Eurasians, Chinese-Indonesians and Arab-Indonesians into his vision of an independent Indonesia.[173] While they had many differences he also had much in common with Hatta. They both believed in the economic and moral power of self-help, mutual organisations and small-scale enterprise. They both also believed that religion was a personal matter and were strongly opposed to it being the basis of political parties, labour unions or an independent Indonesia.

As he observed the failure of new unions to take root among Surabaya workers, Sutomo became convinced that the Study Club should take the initiative. He believed that unions had so far not proved powerful enough to counter bad working conditions and that the Indonesian Study Club, with its strong leadership and well resourced organisation, would be able to do much better.[174] On 12 July 1929 the Indonesian Study Club organised

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24 (1977), pp. 27–38. See also, Benedict Anderson, "A Time of Darkness and a Time of Light", in *The Spectre of Comparisons. Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998). Sutomo's reminiscenses have been translated by Paul W van der Veur, *Towards a Glorious Indonesia* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, 1987).

[173] See, for example, "Soal Indo di Indonesia", *Soeara Oemoem*, 29 November 1935 and "Bekerdja Bersama-sama dengan kaoem Indo-Europeanen", *Soeara PKVI*, December 1935.

[174] Sutomo believed that one of the major reasons why the Indonesian Study Club would be successful in organising labour unions whereas other before it had failed was because a broad range of Indonesians respected it, from the aristocrats to the common people. This respect was because they knew that all of its activities were based on the principles of "kebenaran, keadilan dan ketjintaan" (honesty, justice and devotion). See, speech reported in *Soeloeh Ra'jat Indonesi*a, 7 August 1929.

a public meeting to establish a taxi drivers' union, Sarekat Chauffeur Indonesia. This placed the Study Club in direct competition with the PSI.[175]

In the latter half of 1929 Sutomo outlined his thinking on labour unions in a series of major speeches at public meetings. In October 1929, for example, he surveyed the development of labour unions in the Netherlands. Thirty years ago, he said, there were no labour unions and the worst possible conditions for workers. This was all changed by the Netherlands Federation of Labour Unions (NVV) which educated workers to be aware of their conditions and organised them to force better wages and conditions from employers. These improvements to Dutch workers' wages and conditions had yet to flow through to workers in Indonesia. Sutomo was reported as saying:

> If a more collective spirit had been shown during the 1925 workers' unrest and if there had not been a shortage of leaders, then workers would now be living in better circumstances and have obtained acknowledgement of many of their rights from both government and employers. [Sutomo] urged workers to organise themselves and explained that the success of labour union action depended on continual agitation, in conjunction with mutual solidarity, party discipline and unconditional support of everything decided by the organisation, with all personal opinions and interests set aside[176]

Sutomo argued that labour unions must work in two directions. First, they must demand improved social laws, controlling such things as child and female labour, working hours and the safety of the workplace and providing basis rights of association for workers. Second, they must struggle for better working conditions: all unions should have a work program which included raising wages and shortening working hours. He warned against mixing religion and politics in labour unions, cautioning that worker unity would fall apart if differences in religious belief or ideological conviction were allowed to intrude.[177]

He also addressed the issue of strikes. On the one hand, he did not rule them out. He was well enough read in European history to know that the strike was an important weapon in the struggle of unions to improve workers' wages and conditions and he was aware that if unions did not have the right to strike, and did not threaten to exercise that right from time to time, they would have little leverage against employers. Along with all nationalists he was strongly opposed to the battery of repressive laws in the colony

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175 PPO, July 1929, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.
176 PPO, November 1929, in Ibid.
177 Ibid.

which were used to hobble the development of unions. On the other hand, he argued that a strike should only be considered when a union had good leadership, committed and disciplined members, and a strong strike fund. Strikes in Europe had succeeded, he argued, not just because of the legal framework within which unions operated but also because European unions had large strike funds with which they could support striking workers and their families. If an Indonesian union wanted to organise a strike, he believed that the first question it should ask itself was whether or not it had a chance of success. Entering into strikes which were doomed to failure from the start only weakened the position of colonial workers. In his view, there were many important lessons to be learnt from the failure of the major strikes in the colony, the most important of which was that a large strike fund was essential. Without a large strike fund a labour union had no power. The stronger the fund the more attention employers would give to workers. Thus he argued that the largest strike yet seen in colonial Indonesia, the railway workers strike in 1923, never had a chance of succeeding because the VSTP lacked a strong strike fund.[178]

While Sutomo frequently spoke of workers' right to strike, and of the need for labour unions to have strong strike funds, it is clear that he was convinced that the basic conditions for successful strikes were lacking in colonial Indonesia. Whenever a particular strike occurred, or was proposed, Sutomo made known his disapproval. For example, he had opposed nurses at the Surabaya Municipal Hospital going on strike in 1924 and considered the three largest strikes in the colony, those of the railway workers, the pawnshop workers and the sugar factory workers, ill conceived, poorly planned and doomed to failure.[179] In his view the short-term objective of a strong strike fund was not actually to launch a strike but to use as a tactical weapon in negotiations with employers:

> ... a fighting fund is nothing other than an asset of an organisation, which is not exclusively created to use during strikes, but in the first instance should be used as a way of frightening employers. If a large fighting fund exists, then employers will pay more attention to the wishes of employees.[180]

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178 Ibid. At a course meeting of the *Sarekat Chauffeur Indonesia* in January 1930 Sutomo was reported to have stated that a successful strike could only occur "... at a time when international trade was strong, and when there was solidarity between leaders and members, which can only be realised through organizational discipline and the possession of a powerful fighting fund." PPO, January 1930, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929-1930..

179 See, discussion in Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*, chapters 3 and 5.

180 PPO March 1930, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

In his reading of the history of labour unions in Europe, Sutomo was particularly influenced by the British labour movement. He noted that many British labour unions had evolved out of friendly societies and trade guilds and observed that almost all had a deep involvement in social and economic issues, with a stress on mutual benefit societies and cooperatives. The lesson for Indonesia, he believed, was that if labour unions were to be successful they needed to engage far more closely with workers' daily lives. A labour union focussed on supporting the everyday social and economic needs of workers and educating them about the value of collective action would in time draw workers' into lasting commitments. While Sutomo would never have used the term 'class consciousness', nevertheless he believed that workers' should be educated to an increased consciousness of themselves and their potential political power. He believed that a strong labour movement with deep linkages into urban workers' world would be of enormous benefit to the broader nationalist movement.

Sutomo clearly believed that if unions were organised along these lines then government and employers would take notice and could be persuaded to improve workers' wages and conditions. Little personal correspondence between political leaders has survived, but one letter that has is from Sutomo to the Batavian nationalist, and close confident of Sukarno, Husni Thamrin.[181] Written in September 1929, the letter might have been a response to criticism from Thamrin, and perhaps also Sukarno, about his emphasis on labour union activities at the expense of the political movement. In the letter Sutomo sought the support of Thamrin for his taking the leadership of the labour movement and asked him to discuss the matter with the PNI leaders Sartono and Sukarno. Although he was not to get their support—the arrest of Sukarno in December 1929 intervened—the letter makes clear his views on the importance of organising urban workers:

> If I can speak quietly with you and Sukarno, I will be able to prove to you that our exertions in the *labour movement*, will make us a thousand times more powerful. In this way we are also *more dangerous* because the masses will truly stand behind us.
>
> We often say that the colonial government stands under the influence of capitalist forces which exploit our land. These forces are only able to do so by using native *labourers*. And if we mobilise them, *not in a political sense*,

[181] There are portraits of Thamrin in Susan Abeyasekere, *One Hand Clapping: Indonesian nationalists and the Dutch 1939–1942* and William J. O'Malley, "Indonesia in the Great Depression: A Study of East Sumatra and Jogjakarta in the 1930's", Ph.D dissertation, Cornell University, 1977.

> but by opening their eyes to their human rights as employees, and we explain this active struggle in this way to the colonial government, whereby through good planning, through intensive work with the masses, through good discipline and through the development of self-confidence we possess power and authority in society, then the government will pay more attention to us.[182]

The nature of the relationship between labour unions and political parties divided the nationalist elite. Those convinced that labour unions must be involved in nationalist politics, preferably directly linked to political parties, were critical of Sutomo's views, arguing that they weakened the nationalist movement. If they had seen Sutomo's letter to Thamrin in which he referred to mobilising people "… not in a political sense" they would have only been confirmed in their views. Clearly, though, Sutomo was not denigrating political activity, rather he was asserting that the organisation of urban labour was important in its own right and would be more effective outside the ideological divisiveness of political parties. He believed that a strong labour movement, focussed on industrial issues, on improving workers' socio-economic conditions, and on raising their consciousness of their rights, both complemented and strengthened the political movement for independence and was essential for the creation of a just and prosperous post-colonial nation.

The decision by the Indonesian Study Club to create its own labour unions brought a financial and organisational base to Surabaya unions that had hitherto been lacking. The Study Club building provided offices for the new unions and a venue for meetings. It was able to draw on the support of lawyers, doctors, journalists, teachers, officials and prominent Chinese-Indonesian businessmen for its expanding activities. They provided the money and the professional resources not just for socio-economic activities but also for the establishment in 1932 of the daily newspaper, *Soeara Oemoem*, and the purchase of a large building as the Study Club headquarters and meeting place. With PNI and Budi Utomo activists also members, the Study Club was in a unique position to create industry-wide unions for workers in the private sector and to unite them into a city-wide federation, free of the political competition which had dogged all previous efforts.

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[182] Sutomo to Thamrin, 10 September 1929, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 23 July 1930, Secret Mail Report 1930/727, NA. The copy of this document sent to the Colonial Office in The Hague contains a footnote stating that the emphasis was in the original.

The Indonesian Study Club moved carefully in organising Surabaya workers. It was well aware that many of the promises made in earlier years had not been delivered and that workers were nervous about once again joining unions. Reports on course meetings consistently referred to leaders emphasising the importance of building memberships gradually and concentrating on industrial and socio-economic issues[183] By the middle of 1930 the Indonesian Study Club had created seven unions for private sector workers in Surabaya: for taxi drivers, for private tramway drivers, for printing workers, for workers at the British American Tobacco Company, for tailors, for male domestic workers, and a general union for all workers[184] While the initial focus was Surabaya, the unions steadily expanded to nearby towns and by the middle of the year as far as the Central Java city of Yogyakarta. It is impossible to get precise figure on how many workers joined the unions, but one estimate was that by August 1930 they had a total membership of around 2,000.[185]

The labour unions organised by Indonesian Study Club members stressed the provision of social and economic services. The union for taxi drivers (Sarekat Chauffeur Indonesia—SCI) is a good example.[186] It quickly spread beyond Surabaya to enrol taxi drivers in towns throughout East Java and Central Java. The union prided itself on its mutual benefit activities. It established a credit cooperative, which made small loans to cover sudden emergencies, such as fines imposed on taxi drivers by local courts. No wonder taxi drivers borrowed from the credit cooperative when it charged only nine per cent interest on a six month loan compared with up to 40 per cent by moneylenders. Members also trusted it with their savings.[187] The union also introduced members to the Indonesian National Bank, created by the Indonesian Study Club in October 1929, where they could obtain loans for the purchase of vehicles and become owner-drivers.[188]

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183 Even police reports admitted that this was the case. See, Attorney-General to Governor-General, 23 July 1930, Secret Mail Report 1930/727, NA.

184 PPO August and September 1930, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 1, 1929–1930.

185 *Bintang Timoer*, 19 August 1930, cited in PPO August and September 1930, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, *1929–1930*

186 *Fadjar Asia*, 12 March 1929.

187 *Soeara Oemoem*, 3 February 1931.

188 The Indonesian National Bank was established on 20 October 1929. It developed from the Bank Bumiputera established by the Indonesian Study Club some eighteen months earlier. In its short life the Bank Bumiputera received some 269 loan requests, totaling 152,000 guilders. The decision to convert the Bank Bumiputera into a limited liability com-

In August 1929 PNI and Indonesian Study Club members were the driving forces behind the formation of the OJS Bond Indonesia, a union for workers in the privately owned East Java Steam Tram Company. Its origins were in a reading club for railway and tramway workers created by Rahardjo as a way of entering the world of urban workers. Rahardjo became chairman and Djojosudjono, another PNI member and member of the Indonesian Study Club, secretary/treasurer with two other executive positons held by OJS workers.[189] Most branch executives were also controlled by local PNI members and the majority of members were skilled workers.

Although the OJS Bond Indonesia quickly became the largest union in Surabaya, its leaders were worried about the real commitment of workers. Members at a course meeting in January 1930 were urged by Rahardjo to work harder to overcome the indolence of many in the union. He expressed the frustration of western-educated middle-class union leaders that workers were not sufficiently conscious of their duties as members of labour unions, that they lacked self discipline and that the labour union executive received little cooperation from them. Workers' nervousness about their vulnerability can be seen in January 1930, when in response to the arrests of Sukarno and three other PNI leaders many members of the PNI who worked at the East Java Steam Tram Company destroyed their PNI membership cards, fearing they might be caught up in the government repression.[190]

A New Labour Union Federation

Indonesian labour union leaders frequently talked of a 'labour movement' despite the fragility of many unions and the difficulty of combined action.

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pany was to enable it to expand its operations. It had a share capital of 500,000 guilders, with shareholding restricted to Indonesians. The prospectus was advertised widely in Indonesian language newspapers. The Indonesian National Bank was established after some months of debate between the Indonesian Study Club and the PSI as to whether charging interest on loans was permitted by Islam. The Study Club had argued for a national bank to be established by the PPPKI, but the first Congress of the PPPKI in 1929 abandoned the idea after strong opposition from the PSI. The Study Club decided to go ahead on its own, publishing a series of articles in its newspaper by one of its members, Fakih Hasin, which argued that charging interest on loans was permissible. See, *Soeara BOW*, December 1928, *Soeloeh Ra'jat Indonesia*, 2 May 1928 and 21 October 1928, *Soeara Oemoem*, 25 February 1932.

189 PPO, September 1929, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930. The government viewed the PNI movement into labour unions as potentially dangerous, much more so that the earlier SKBI, because of the quality of its leadership.

190 See reports in PPO January 1930 in Ibid.

At the same time as political leaders were trying to bring diverse nationalist parties together into one federation, labour union leaders were trying to realise their vision of a powerful labour union federation. If it was difficult to unite unions in one city—none of the city-wide federations were long-lived—it was even more difficult to create a labour union federation which spanned the whole of the Indies. Two attempts in the 1920s—the Perserikatan Persatuan Kaum Buruh (formed in 1920, initially under Central Sarekat Islam and PKI joint leadership but by 1921 under exclusive CSI leadership) and the Revolutionaire Vakcentrale (formed in 1921 under PKI leadership)—were short-lived failures. So too was the Persatuan Vakbond Hindia (PVH) created in 1922 to try to bring the communist- and non-communist-led federations together.[191] There were many reasons for the divisions within the Indonesian elites in both the political and the labour union spheres—ideological, religious, ethnic and inter-personal differences being most important—but regional tensions also contributed. The power base of each political and labour union leader was in one of the major cities on Java. All were watchful to protect their power bases. Inter-city rivalries, as well as the high cost of travel between cities, were important limitations on sustained cooperation.

Having regained the confidence of a growing number of urban workers, in 1929 union leaders began to talk once again of creating an Indonesia-wide federation. They were well aware of the impediments which had caused earlier efforts to fail, but they were also aware that a divided labour movement was a weaker labour movement in coping with the state and employers. The initiative for another attempt at cooperation came first from unions in the public sector, not surprisingly given that they were the largest and strongest of the unions and had a common interest because their wages and conditions were determined by the colonial government.

The PBST had already joined the VVL, the European-led federation of public sector unions, in May 1928. It was the first Indonesian labour union to seek membership of the federation. The close relationship between PBST and Spoorbond leaders was an important influence on its decision. The PBST was impressed by the VVL, because it was a well funded and well organised federation whose social-democract leaders had tried for many years to broaden its appeal to encompass the interests of Indonesian unions. It had consistently campaigned for improved wages and conditions

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191 See, Ingleson, *Search for Justice*, pp. 124–127, 214–217 and McVey, *The Rise of Indonesia Communism*, chapters 4–8, especially pp. 101–154.

for all public sector workers, and in 1925 and 1926 had argued for improved leave conditions for Indonesians and for pensions for widows and orphans to be extended to Indonesians.[192] The VVL welcomed the PBST's membership, agreed to a significantly reduced annual membership fee, and over the next 18 months accepted a number of proposals put forward by the PBST. [193] However, even the reduced membership fee proved too much for the cash-strapped PBST, and at the end of 1929 it withdrew from the VVL while assuring it of continued cooperation.[194]

In the increasingly polarised political context with large race-based disparities in wages and conditions it was a forlorn hope for a European-led labour union federation to bridge the race divide. The larger Indonesian labour unions for public sector workers valued the work of the VVL, but wanted a federation under Indonesian control. The pawnshop workers' union took the lead. By 1929 it was frustrated at its failure to make any headway in its four-year campaign for improved wages and conditions. Its chairman, Surjopranoto, was also chairman of other unions for state employees headquartered in Yogyakarta. He was close to Suroso. Surjopranoto reasoned that if unions he and Suroso led could be brought together into a federation, and if they could persuade the federation of teacher unions, the PGHB, to join then a campaign for improved wages and conditions for public sector workers would have a greater chance of success.

In April 1930, the Persatuan Vakbonden Pegawei Negeri (Federation of Public Sector Unions—PVPN) was formed in Yogyakarta with Suroso as Chairman. Some 13 Indonesian unions joined almost immediately, representing a membership of 28,750. Those who formed the PVPN were conscious of the failure of earlier attempts to create labour union federations, in particular the failure of the PPKB, which they attributed to its involvement in party politics. Reflecting in December 1937 on the history of efforts to create labour union federations, Suroso analysed the reasons for the failure of the PPKB and by implication the reason for the success of the PVPN:

> Unfortunately the PPKB was unsuccessful, because it was based on politics and was too much under the influence of political parties which had people on its executive. For one and a half years, as leaders quarrelled and struggled

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192 See, article in *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 Janaury 1930.
193 See: *Kereta Api*, July 1928, August 1928 and April-May 1929.
194 *Kareta Api*, January 1930.

> for influence, the PPKB floundered and was unable to work in the interests of labour unions[195]

At the same time as Surjopranoto and Suroso were working to create a federation of unions for public sector employees, there were moves within the federation of political parties, the PPPKI, to create one national labour union federation under its aegis. Formed in 1927, largely under the initiative of the PNI and the PSI, in September 1928 the PPPKI executive moved to Surabaya after Sutomo was elected chairman and the Surabaya PNI activist Anwari elected secretary/treasurer. Sutomo and Anwari saw an opportunity to create a labour union federation under their control.

A national labour union federation was a major item on the agenda of the second PPPKI Congress in December 1929. Sutomo spoke at length on the importance of labour unions. As he had so often done in public speeches over the past two years, he began by providing his audience with a brief history of the labour movement in Europe, reminding them that it was the labour movement that had forced Netherlands governments to introduce improved social laws such as unemployment benefits, age pensions and compensation for invalidity and accidents. He cautioned, though, that for labour unions to be successful they must be led by intellectuals. Workers could not succeed on their own. He praised Semaun—"… the best of all leaders because the most genuine"—for the way he represented workers to employers and resolved labour disputes and contrasted this with the strikes in the engineering companies in 1926, "… where the communists took control because the nationalist intellectuals were unable to relate to [the workers]." It was time for Indonesian intellectuals to provide leadership by creating a labour union federation and expanding the reach of unions.[196] The Congress resolved to create a labour union federation under its direct supervision, but the arrest of PNI leaders just a few days later prevented any action.

Sutomo and Anwari had wanted the PPPKI to become the vehicle for a nation-wide labour union federation and for it to be based in Surabaya under their control. The formation of the PVPN in Yogyakarta by Suroso and Surjopranoto stymied their aspirations to national leadership. They were particularly concerned that Suroso and Surjopranoto had indicated that the PVPN might eventually include private sector unions. The Indo-

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[195] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 January 1938.

[196] Report on the PPPKI Congrees, Solo, December 1929, in Mail Report 1930/72, p. 5, NA.

nesian Study Club responded in May 1930 by creating its own labour union federation, Persatuan Sarekat Sekerja Indonesia (Federation of Indonesian Unions—PSSI), incorporating the Surabaya-based unions under its control. The PSSI saw itself as the private sector equivalent of the PVPN. The composition of its central executive reflected the inter-connection between the Surabaya branch of the PNI and the Indonesian Study Club and the multiple roles of leading activists. Chairman was Ruslan Wongsokusumo, who was chairman of most of the unions established by the Study Club. He was also a member of the PNI Surabaya branch executive. Secretary-treasurer was Anwari, who was chairman of the Surabaya branch of the PNI and secretary of the PPPKI. Other members of the executive included Djokosudjono (executive member of the PNI Surabaya and executive member of the OJS Bond Indonesia), Amari (member of the PNI branch executive and executive member of the printing workers' union), Ma'rup (treasurer of the tailors' union) and Reksoadmidjojo (executive member of the taxi drivers' union). Sutomo, Suwono, Gondokusumo and Samsi Sastrowidagdo were named as advisers to the federation.[197] It is clear that Sutomo, Anwari and Ruslan hoped for an eventual fusion with the PVPN in order to create a national labour union federation. The obstacles to this happening were formidable, not least of which was the issue of who was to have control.

The Eve of the Depression

At the end of 1930, Indonesian labour unions had an estimated membership of 75,485. In the four years since the communist uprisings there had been an almost fourfold increase. The arrest of PNI leaders in December 1929 did not slow this growth. Union leaders might lament a lack of commitment from members, but they had largely succeeded in overcoming urban workers' fears of joining a union. The great majority of union members were in public sector unions, but at the end of 1930 there were hopeful signs, especially in Surabaya, that efforts to create new unions for private sector workers were beginning to show results. The finances of public sector unions were in most cases sound and many had been able to appoint full-time staff to support members and to enable membership drives. The industrial laws, especially the anti-strike legislation, and the press restrictions remained strong limitations on union activities, but the formation of

[197] PPO May 1930, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

the federation of public sector unions and the PSSI in Surabaya provided hope that some of the divisions within the labour movement might be overcome. At the end of 1930 labour union leaders could look back on the past four years with some satisfaction and be optimistic about future growth. This was to change as the world-wide Depression swept over Indonesia.

CHAPTER FOUR

SURVIVING THE DEPRESSION

The Depression began to affect Indonesia in 1930, with the colony only slowly recovering from around the middle of 1936. It devastated export crop earnings, with severe effects on a colonial economy reliant on them. The collapse of export crops impacted heavily on those dependent on wage labour. Sugar factories in small towns closed and plantations drastically reduced their workforces. Workshops in Surabaya that made and repaired the machinery for the sugar factories and plantations received fewer orders and were forced to dismiss workers. Many companies went bankrupt. The ports through which the export crops flowed became much quieter and employed far fewer workers. The railways carried less freight and passenger numbers fell sharply as fewer people travelled from inland towns to the cities for work. They too reduced their workforces. The state was the largest single employer in the colony. With reduced economic activity state revenue dried up. In order to balance its budget the colonial government sharply reduced both administrative workers and workers in the state-owned industries. The State Railways and the Pawnshop Service, two of the largest state-owned industries, reduced their workforces by one-third between 1930 and 1937. Tens of thousands of skilled and unskilled wage earners lost their jobs in both the public and the private sectors.

The Urban Impact

There has been much debate about the standard of living in Indonesia in the 1930s. The debate has focussed on average incomes compared to the prices of basic food and consumer goods with the general conclusion that real wages in the Depression years were higher than they had been in the 1920s.[1] Statistical averages obscure the fact that the impact of the Depres-

[1] There is a growing literature on the impact of the Depression on Indonesia, mainly focused on the rural impact. See, Peter Boomgaard and Ian Brown (eds.), *Weathering the Storm. The Economies of Southeast Asia in the 1930s Depression* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000), especially chapters by Boomgaard, J. Thomas Lindblad, Jeroen Tauwen, S. Nawiyanto, William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Anne Booth. See also, John Ingleson, "Urban Java

sion on urban wage-earners was far from uniform. The majority of urban workers in Indonesia kept their jobs and no doubt some did improve their standard of living as prices fell more quickly than their wages. However, official and unofficial reports consistently stated that for most urban people life was more difficult, and for many desperate. Cuts in wages and conditions and reductions in working hours fell disproportionately on the lower paid. For example, in 1931 the Sister Societies railways, based in Yogyakarta cut the wages of European employees by 10 per cent, the wages of middle level Indonesian employees by 20 per and wages of lower level Indonesian workers by up to 65 per cent by placing many on local casual rates.[2] Increased taxes and charges by both the state and local councils also had a disproportionate impact on the lower paid. For those who retained their jobs there were far fewer opportunities for promotion than in earlier years, especially in the colonial bureaucracy and the state-owned industries.[3] Many jobs were downgraded, with employers taking advantage of the Depression and the surfeit of school graduates seeking work to reduce the cost of labour permanently.[4]

Young people were hit particularly hard as fewer new workers were recruited at a time when there was a growth in the number of Indonesians completing a western education. Government and private schools were producing about 10,000 Indonesian graduates a year in the 1930s, most of whom could not find jobs matching their expectations. In 1937 the Labour

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During the Depression" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1988), pp. 292–309, Anne Booth, "Living Standards and the Distribution of Income in Colonial Indonesia: a Review of the Evidence" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (September 1988), pp. 310–34, and Anne Booth, "Japanese Import Penetration and Dutch Response: Some Aspects of Economic Policy Making in Colonial Indonesia" in Shinya Sugiyawa and Milagras C. Guerrero (eds.), *International Commercial Rivalry in Southeast Asia in the Interwar Period* (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asian Studies Monograph 39, 1994), pp. 133–164.

[2] See report in *De West-Java Courant*, 18 October 1932.

[3] This discussion of the impact of the Depression on urban workers draws on my articles, "Fear of the kampung, fear of unrest: urban unemployment and colonial policy in 1930s Java" and "Urban Java During the Depression".

[4] For example, at the end of 1934 the State Railways downgraded many clerks to the rank of secretary. The criteria for the downgrading was inadequate Dutch and lack of capacity for independent thought. The railway workers' union, the PBST, rightly protested that this would only affect Indonesians, because it was inconceivable that Europeans would have inadequate Dutch. The financial consequences were significant. The maximum salary for a clerk was 110 guilders, but for a chief secretary only 68 guilders. See, *Spoorbond's Blad*, January/February 1935. Another example is the wages of foremen in the state gaols. In 1932 the jobs of first and second class foremen were reclassified to third class, resulting in a reduction in wages from 135 guiders a month to 55 guilders. See, *De West-Java Courant*, 1 February 1933.

Office estimated that there were at least 20,000 unemployed young Indonesians who had completed a western middle or high school education and that this number was growing annually.[5] The Department of Education predicted that the colony would continue for many years to produce far more Indonesian graduates from western schools than could be absorbed by the labour market.[6] Graduates from the colony's technical and trade schools fared just as badly. Of the 3,779 European and Indonesian graduates in 1931 and 1932, over half were unemployed at the beginning of 1933.[7] It was estimated in 1937 that during the seven Depression years some 30,000 young Indonesian graduates from western schools could not find full-time employment.[8]

Government officials and labour union leaders as well as the Dutch- and the Indonesian-language press complained about young European and Indonesian school graduates preferring office work and their reluctance to engage in manual work. The Indo-European Association (IEV), worried about systemic unemployment among young Eurasians, urged them to seek new kinds of work, including establishing their own businesses. Indonesian leaders were equally worried about what they saw as unrealistic expectations among the young, with some commenting that they must lower their sights.[9]

The Depression years saw a great growth in unemployment among urban workers but probably an even greater growth in under-employment. Some of the worst affected urban workers in the Depression years were those paid by the hour or the day. Most employers, including the harbours, the railways, the post office, the construction industry, the oil industry, engineering workshops and local councils, employed large numbers of day-wage workers. Life was especially difficult for them, with an abundant supply of labour but few jobs. Daily wages had always been low, but the Depression enabled employers to push them even lower. Day-wage labour-

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[5] Labour Office, "Samenvattend Overzicht van de Werkloosheid en Haar Bestrijding", p. 6 enclosed in Mail Report 1937/858, NA.

[6] In 1937 the Labour Office estimated that youth unemployment was still growing by about 1,000 each year and that it would be at least eight years before the problem of youth unemployment could be solved. "Nota Inzake Jeugdwerkloosheid in Nederlandsche-Indie en hare Bestrijding", Labour Office, 8 November 1936, enclosed in Director of Justice to Governor-General, 10 May 1937, Mail Report 1937/858, p. 7, NA.

[7] *Economische Weekblad*, 23 June 1933, pp. 2179–2180.

[8] "Nota inzake Jeugdwerkloosheid".

[9] See, for example, "Naik Daradjat Kembali", *Pandji Poestaka*, 13 October 1931 and "Mentjari kerdja" in *Pandji Poestak*a, 1 August 1932.

ers had no bargaining power. In 1933, a new road was being constructed in Semarang by about 1,000 day-wage labourers recruited from nearby villages. Paid 25 cents a day, they sent 10 cents of this back to their home villages to support their families. When 300 of them stopped work, protesting that they could not live in the city on 15 cents a day, they were promptly dismissed and replaced by new labourers recruited from the villages.[10]

Some day-wage labourers gave up on the towns and cities for the time being, particularly those who regularly moved between town and village. They remained in their villages where they made do with whatever work they could find or were supported by family and relatives. However, most who lost their jobs in the formal sector of the urban economy could not, or did not want to, return to villages. Many became dependent on families or neighbours in the kampung, on occasional work in the informal kampung economy or, as a last resort, on charitable support.

The Labour Office monitored closely the impact of the Depression on urban Indonesians. Late in 1932 it reported a response from a man in the harbour workers' kampung at Cirebon, on the north coast of Central Java:

> I transport sugar from the harbour to the ships. The work is distributed among the existing labourers. Therefore, each month I only get four days work. The other twenty six days we are all idle. Obviously, we are poorly nourished. We eat only once a day [11]

A survey of a Yogyakarta kampung at the same time revealed three unemployed men to every one who had a job. One of the men stated that some of the unemployed had resorted to searching through rubbish bins for food. Eventually too many did this and the police intervened. He despaired about his life, "If you stay in the house you feel bad about yourself. What else is there to do, without money, other than to walk around?"[12]

Official surveys and newspaper reports constantly spoke of unprecedented numbers of people living on the streets of the towns and cities of Java. Europeans as well as Indonesians. They also reported that the roads of rural Java were full of people on the move, seeking casual work and living wherever they could, often at the side of roads and rivers. Dutch and Indonesian charities and poor relief schemes organised by local councils provided support for some but could not cope with the number of people

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[10] *Soeara Oemoem*, 10 November 1933.

[11] Head of the Labour Office to the Governor-General, 25 November 1932, p. 2, enclosed in V 2 June 1934–2, NA.

[12] Ibid., p. 14.

who had no job, no house, no money and nowhere to go. The burgeoning number of local charities is an indication of the misery of the Depression years for many people. Charities provided shelter for the homeless, support for the unemployed and their families, hostels for women and orphanages for children, as well as support for those in desperate need in the kampung.

Despite the common belief that Indonesians were not really urban people and could always return to their villages during economic downturns, surveys carried out by the Labour Office provide a consistent picture of workers remaining in the towns and cities after they were retrenched. In early 1932, for example, a survey was carried out of 500 workers retrenched in 1931 by the large State Railways workshops in Madiun, East Java. Only a few had retreated to villages. Seventeen were on wachtgeld (literally 'waiting money'—unemployment pay for permanent employees paid as a declining fraction of their normal pay for up to five years) and 29 had moved to the nearby city of Surabaya in search of work. The rest remained in Madiun. Some had found other work but most were reliant on their families.[13] Another report in September 1931, surveyed 108 unemployed Christian Menadonese and Ambonese in Batavia, of whom 13 were classified as too old to work again, 22 deemed to be 'work shy' and 73 unemployed as a result of the Depression. Of the 73, one was supported by the Batavia Unemployed Support Committee and 38 by the Destitute Christians' Fund. The rest lived in poor, simple conditions, housed and fed by family and friends.[14]

How did unemployed workers in the formal sector of the urban economy survive the Depression? Their first response was to seek alternative work in the formal sector, even if it was less skilled or lower paid. This was difficult to find. If unsuccessful they turned to the informal sector. As the government and private employers retrenched workers and drastically reduced their intake of young graduates, opportunities for skilled and educated Indonesians decreased. All the indications are that many artisans and educated Indonesians were forced to seek work that in the 1920s they would have found anathema. As the colonial economy never fully recovered from the Depression, downward mobility was a common experience of many urban Indonesians.

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[13] A.G. Vreede, "De Werkloosheid in het eerste halfjaar 1932", *Koloniale Studien*, Vol. 16 (October 1932), p. 677.

[14] A.G. Vreede, 'De Werkloosheid in Nederlandsch-Indie in het tweede halfjaar 1931', *Koloniale Studien*, Vol. 16 (April 1932), p. 201.

An investigation into the life of Batavia taxi drivers in 1940, for example, observed that in the past decade increasing numbers of better-educated Indonesians worked in the industry.[15] The Depression not only led to a strong increase in the number of taxis on the roads in Surabaya, with a consequent fall in income for drivers, but also to competition between Europeans, Chinese and Indonesians for work. By the end of the decade there was a shift in ownership from Europeans and Chinese to Indonesians, as lower rates drove the former groups out of the industry.[16] The downward mobility of skilled workers and of those who regarded themselves as permanent urban dwellers made life in the cities more difficult still for the unskilled and circular migrants.[17]

The Depression accelerated the process of Indonesians moving into jobs previously the preserve of Chinese or Europeans. Employers realised that they could cut costs substantially by employing Indonesians on lower wages. Many Europeans were replaced by Indonesians, particularly in the service industries, such as banking, and clerical/administrative areas, and fewer young Europeans were engaged, which contributed to the high levels of unemployment in the European community, particularly among the young. Chinese workers also came under pressure as they too were generally more expensive to hire than Indonesians. This was particularly apparent in the workshops and factories. The result was a further significant shift in the ethnic composition of job categories in the 1930s, with Indonesians entering areas previously the preserve of other ethnic groups.

Europeans also sought lower level work. In 1932 the Hire Car Employers Association employed eight Europeans as taxi drivers among whom was an unemployed engineer and young men who were graduates of the Dutch-language school system or who had technical school diplomas.[18] Police regulations were changed so that Europeans could become police agents and hospital regulations were changed to allow them to become assistant nurses. Many Europeans accepted these jobs, leading to concern among Indonesian labour unions that this was reducing opportunities for Indonesians.[19] In a racially segregated society these changes were difficult for

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[15] R.N. Djojosoemarman, "Taxi chauffeurs te Batavia", *Koloniale Tijdschrift*, Vol. 30 (1941), pp. 606–632.

[16] *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 20 October 1932.

[17] A.G. Vreede, "De Omvang der werkloosheid in Nederlandsch-Indie over de periode December 1930/June 1931", *Koloniale Studien*, Vol. 15 (October 1931), p. 520.

[18] *Indische Courant*, 29 January 1932.

[19] See, "Nonah Mantri Verpleegster", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 24 July 1934.

Europeans to accept. A Dutch-language newspaper reported in 1934 that Europeans who accepted lower level jobs in the Semarang Hospital were unhappy because they had to do tasks such as clean floors and attend native patients. The situation was disapproved of by European doctors and nurses and created problems for young Indonesian doctors, because, in the newspaper's view, Europeans did not like receiving instructions from Indonesians.[20]

The attitude of the colonial government to urban poverty and unemployment reflected the prevailing ideology in the Netherlands where social security was largely a matter for churches and charities. At the beginning of the Depression there was no provision for support of the urban unemployed. The government had rejected voices in the Volksraad in 1921, in 1922 and again in 1924 that called for the creation of an unemployment fund for Indonesian and European workers in the modern sector of the economy, funded by compulsory contributions from employers.[21] It had also ignored a report on unemployment produced in 1926 by the federation of European labour unions (VVL). The VVL had argued that the Indies could no longer provide enough work for European and Indonesian graduates from the lower and middle schools with diplomas and certificates. In its view this was because the Indies was a colony, and industry in the hands of foreign capital with profits repatriated to Europe. The only way to reduce unemployment among school graduates was to develop government industries and reinvest the profits in the colony. When unemployment started rising again in the 1930s, particularly among the young, the VVL revisited its 1926 report and again urged the government to take responsibility for reducing unemployment.[22]

As long as the number of unemployed Europeans and skilled or western-educated Indonesians was low, as it was in the 1920s, the argument that unemployment relief was not a matter for government was sustainable.

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[20] The article was published in the *Indische Courant* and quoted in "Nonah Mantri Verpleegster", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 24 July 1934. An article in *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 31 March 1934, lamented the downward mobility of Europeans during the Depression. In recent decades, it argued, Natives had taken the jobs previously the preserve of Europeans, for the most part Eurasians. Now in the Depression, Europeans were having to take work that used to be done by Natives or Chinese. See, Sneevliet Collection, No. 587, IISG

[21] See, "Summary of the Volksraad Committee to consider unemployment in the context of the 1935 Budget", in *Volksraad Handelingen*, 1935–1936, Subject 3, Department 2, Section 4, pp. 1–8.

[22] The 1926 report was reprinted in *Spooorbond's Blad*, 1 April 1930. It was originally published in *De Vakbeweging*, 17 April 1926, pp. 297–306.

The sudden growth in urban unemployment as the Depression hit the colony, and particularly the increasingly common sight of impoverished Europeans on the streets, forced the government in December 1930 to give some ground to its critics by creating a Central Committee for the Support of the Unemployed. The primary task of the Committee was to raise money from individuals and businesses in order to support the unemployed through its own projects and through funding local committees in the major cities and towns. The government agreed to provide fifty cents for every guilder raised from private sources, but continued to argue that local communities better understood grass roots problems and that its role should be restricted to supporting private philanthropy.[23]

In justifying supporting only European unemployed and what it called the Indonesian 'chief workers', the colonial government argued that it was much harder to identify unemployed Indonesians because, even in normal times, urban workers moved between town and village as work became available, as well as moving between the formal and the informal sectors of the urban economy. While it was widely acknowledged in both official and unofficial circles that during the Depression years many urban Indonesians were in great need, there was an unshakeable belief that the colony had neither the organisational structures nor the money to solve the problem.[24] The financial consequences of directly supporting Indonesian unemployed weighed heavily on officials. As the Labour Office argued:

> … if care for the unemployed became a task for government, and not only for European unemployed and Native and Chinese unemployed who live in a European manner but also for the great mass of uneducated Native and Chinese unemployed, it would result in unacceptable financial consequences.[25]

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[23] For a clear statement of government policy see *Volksraad Handelingen*, 1935–1936, Third Subject, Second Department, Item 4, p. 2: "… care for the unemployed in the Netherlands Indies, understood as primarily the provision of financial support, should not be the direct responsibility of the government, rather should be left to private initiatives as long as possible."

[24] A good example is an article in April 1934 in the Dutch language colonial press on unemployment among Indonesians which argued that, "Among the millions of natives how will one determine if somebody is unemployed, or is a victim of the Depression? Thousands and thousands have known no other condition throughout their lives. Thousands work for years for a few months each year and for the rest of the time do nothing, living on the labour of their wives, their communities, their families or from all kinds of casual labour." Quoted in *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 4 April 1934, Sneevliet Collection, No. 587, IISH.

[25] *Werkloosheid in Nederlandsch-Indie* (Batavia: Kantoor van Arbeid, 1935), pp. 3–4.

The government believed it could not afford a broad unemployment support system for Indonesians, even for those who were permanent urban workers. It remained confident about the capacity of indigenous social structures to support the unemployed.

As the Depression deepened, the government became concerned about the social and economic consequences of urban unemployment, especially among the young. There was no unanimity within the bureaucracy about what could or should be done, with numerous policy options advanced by different departments. Some were rejected as too difficult, others as too costly. Some were implemented but with little success. At the end of the 1930s the colonial government was forced to admit that it had no solution to the problem of continuing high levels of urban unemployment and acknowledged that unemployment among young western-educated Indonesians and young Europeans had the potential to destabilise the colony.[26]

Indonesian Reactions

Labour union leaders were angry at what they saw as the indifference of the government and the European community to the plight of unemployed Indonesians. In their view, this was further proof that the Dutch ruled in their own interests with little regard for Indonesians. They accepted that some casual and unskilled urban workers would return to their villages of origin and that circular migrants would no longer leave their villages. However, they were aware, in a way that most Europeans were not, that this led to increased poverty in rural Java. Moreover, they repeatedly argued that the government was under-estimating the transformation which had taken place in the towns, where not just skilled or well educated workers but also increasing numbers of unskilled workers no longer had direct connections with the village world. Above all, they were incensed at the constant assertion that Indonesians did not have the same needs as other racial groups in the colony. The Yogyakarta newspaper, *Moestika*, partly owned by Sukiman, the chairman of the pawnshop workers' union, was scathing about a report by an official of the Labour Office in mid-1931:

> He constantly states that educated unemployed people can be supported by family or friends ....

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[26] In the late 1930s formal government statements in the *Volksraad* and responses to questions from members consistently argued along these lines. See, *Volksraad Handelingen.*

> If they lose their jobs they are able to live in the villages, where they will be cared for by their family, and work in the fields tending rice ....

It also questioned the government's view that rural Java had an almost infinite absorptive capacity:

> How are the unemployed expected to survive in the villages, when the villages themselves are groaning under the weight of too many people, and not enough food or work?
>
> If they have to be supported by their families is this a good thing? In earlier years people were already far from prosperous, now they have to share what little they have with the unemployed.[27]

Indonesians were especially critical of public statements by government officials that despite high unemployment there was no evidence of desperate need in the kampung.[28] They were infuriated by official reports arguing that 'natives' could live on two and a half cents a day. The editor of the *Oetoesan Indonesia*, I.P. Marto Kusumo, stated that if a kampung dweller was forced to live on two and a half cents because there was nothing else then he could live, but it was absurd to argue that this was sufficient to have enough to eat, let along cover other needs. Was anyone saying, he asked, that Indonesians could live without money? If two and a half cents a day was considered enough for an Indonesian to live, he asserted, then it should also be enough for a white person.[29] The editor of the Batavia newspaper *Pemandangan* also accepted that it was possible for an Indonesian to survive on two and a half cents a day—indeed many had no choice—but did not see this as a cause for joy. Indonesians, he said, desired to live better lives.[30]

The Labour Office acknowledged that there was a widespread sense of injustice among urban Indonesians during the Depression years. It produced a detailed study in August 1933, which concluded that Indonesians of all ranks and education were comparing the treatment for unemployed Europeans with that for unemployed Indonesians. An unemployed former Indonesian police agent was reported to have made known his feelings about the injustice of it all in the form of an allegory:

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[27] *Moestika*, 17 July 1931.

[28] "Workers' were better off in 1870 than now"—comment of a speaker at a public meeting of labour unions in Semarang on 15 January 1933. Reported in *Locomotief*, 16 January 1933.

[29] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 2 October 1932.

[30] *Pemandangan*, 30 September 1933.

> There was a poor father who had two children. One child was hungry and asked to eat, but the father showed him the empty rice pot. The child accepted this and lay down hungry. This child had a brown skin. But see, the other child, whose skin was white, was also hungry and was surrounded with care, fed, clothed and well housed.[31]

In another case, an unemployed artisan told the investigator that just at the time when he felt helpless because he had nothing to eat, he accidentally came across a newspaper in which there was an article referring to the belief that a native could live on two and a half cents a day. He was so angry and offended that he flung the article to the ground and stamped on it.[32] When Indonesian workers at the Batavian Oil Company (BPM) had their wages cut for a second time in late 1932, but European workers did not, the injustice of it angered one Indonesian who was reported to have said, "Those who are paid a lot are cut a little, while those who are paid a little are cut a lot"[33]

The issue of unemployment dominated debates in the Volksraad during the 1930s. European and Indonesian members alike attacked the government policy of treating unemployment support as primarily a private initiative supported by government, rather than a core government responsibility. Some urged an expanded program of public works to soak up the Indonesian unemployed. Others revived the argument that there should be a permanent unemployment fund with compulsory contributions from employers. Indonesian members, supported by some of the more liberal Europeans, expressed indignation that unemployed Indonesians were greatly disadvantaged compared to unemployed Europeans and drew particular attention to the need to improve support for unemployed Indonesians who were educated workers or tradesmen and who were unable to fall back on family support.[34]

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[31] Enclosure in Director of Justice to Governor-General, 21 August 1933, Mail Report 1933/1224, p. 2, NA.

[32] Enclosure in Director of Justice to Governor-General, 21 August 1933, Mail Report 1933/1224, p. 5.a, NA.

[33] *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 December 1932.

[34] See, Summary of the Volksraad Commission to consider unemployment in the context of the 1935 Budget. *Volksraad Handelingen*, 1935–1936, Subject 3, Department 2, Section 4, pp. 1–8.

Indianisation and the Salaries Commission

In 1933 J.W. Meyer Ranneft, the Vice-President of the Council of the Indies, told an Amsterdam newspaper that the Depression had irrevocably changed the relationship between the Netherlands and its Indonesian colony. He believed that the Netherlands would not be able to retain control of the colony if it no longer had the loyalty of at least a part of the people. This he feared was disappearing.[35]

Meyer-Ranneft was correct in observing that goodwill between politically conscious Indonesians and the Dutch was eroding in the 1930s. It was not simply the impact of the Depression, serious though this was, but also the increasingly reactionary policies of the colonial government towards even the mildest of nationalist activities. It was seen too in the rise of the ultra-conservative Vaderlandsche Club (Fatherland Club) and the small but noisy National Socialist Party, and in the aggressive approach of much of the Dutch-language colonial press towards Indonesian political parties and labour unions. In a series of letters in the early 1930s to the Dutch social-democrat and nationalist sympathiser, J.E. Stokvis, the Batavian political leader Husni Thamrin spoke wearily of the bad atmosphere in the colony with a loss of trust between Indonesians and the colonial government.[36] This was a strong theme of articles in both the European and the Indonesian press throughout the 1930s.[37] This loss of trust was acknowledged by government officials as a potentially serious problem. In 1933 the Director of Justice prepared a detailed report on urban unemployment and poverty. He spoke of a spirit of discontent against the government growing daily:

> The danger comes not just from political agitators who promote a spirit of resistance, but from the bulk of the more educated urban population, every-

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[35] This interview was published by *De Telegraaf* and reprinted in *Soeara Oemoem*, 17 October 1933. Meyer Ranneft was quoted as saying, "We will be unable to operate there unless we retain the loyalty of some of the natives. Many thousands of soldiers and sailors will not be enough to provide peace and stability for us. We must have the loyalty of some of the natives."

[36] These letters are contained in Stokvis Collection, No. 7–48 (8), IISG.

[37] A good example is an article in the Surabaya newspaper, *De Indische Post*, in July 1932. It stated that "… in Indies society great tension and unrest prevails among government employees and general despondency among those privately employed. Of particular note is that self-confidence and optimism have generally declined, replaced by bitterness, considerable resentment and a complete lack of trust in everything and everyone …" Quoted in *Nieuwe Rotterdamsch Courant*, 7 July 1932. Sneevliet Collection, No. 585, IISG.

> one above the level of the labourer, who now have a total lack of trust in the government because it does nothing to relieve their distress.[38]

Indonesians were increasingly unwilling to accept without protest colonial policies based on race criteria. Labour unions and Indonesian members of the Volksraad had long been vocal in their opposition to the three-tier public sector wages system. They objected to it being based on race, rather than on qualifications or function, but also objected to the huge disparity between the tiers. Early in 1930 the government published another report from the Salaries Commission, which recommend further ways to reduce government expenditure. The government had made it clear for some time that it believed budget deficits would increase to unsustainable levels unless there were significant reductions in expenditure. It had also stated that it was committed to Indianisation of government administration and industries, by which expatriate Europeans and Indies-born Europeans would be replaced by less expensive Indonesian workers.[39] Indianisation provided enormous scope for reducing the colonial state's expenditure. It is not surprising, then, that it was accelerated during the Depression years.

To the dismay of Indonesian labour union leaders, the 1930 Salaries Commission Report retained the three-tier government wages system (the BBL).[40] The Commission accepted the justice of a wage system based on skills and function rather than race, as advocated by Indonesian labour unions in their submissions, but argued that the reality of Indies society meant that for some time a separate wage scale was needed for government employees whose standard of living demanded a higher wage than that paid to natives. In order to reduce costs, it reclassified some jobs from tier C to tier B and others from tier B to tier A. Indonesian union leaders were particularly incensed that the Salaries Commission created a new top salary scale within tier A, only to reclassify a number of categories of jobs from the lowest rung of tier B to the top rung of tier A and to place a hard barrier between the two tiers. By 1931, there were 4,874 Indonesians in the tier B government workforce, or 30 per cent of the total.[41] The number had grown rapidly in recent years. The government estimated that 2,300 second class clerks would be affected by this reclassification, 62 per cent of whom

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[38] This report is enclosed in Director of Justice to Governor-General, 21 August 1933, Secret Mail Report 1933/1224, NA.

[39] See, "Indianisatie", speech of Surjopranoto at the PVPN Congress, Mataram, *Moestika*, 15 January 1932.

[40] Bezoldigingsregeling Burgerlijke Landsdienaren (salary regulations for civil servants).

[41] See, *Soeara PTT*, October 1931.

were Indonesians. The decision to reclassify jobs from tier B to tier A was seen as just another way of keeping natives in their place.[42]

In defending its new wages policy the government argued that it had no choice but to reduce the overall cost of the colonial administration and that two fundamental reforms were necessary. First, there had to be broad salary reductions, with public sector salaries reflecting the financial position of the colony. Second, salary levels had to reflect a native rather than a European standard of living. Kiewiet de Jong the government representative for general matters in the Volksraad, informed members that the government envisaged this as a long-term process. As Indonesians became a growing proportion of public employees at all levels the government believed that the welfare and economic development of the country required them to be paid at rates comparable to those in the private sector. It accepted the Salaries Commission recommendation that once 60 per cent of a particular job category was occupied by Indonesians it should be reclassified from tier B to tier A.[43]

Suroso and other Indonesian labour union leaders supported Indianisation but were concerned that it would lead to significant reductions in public sector wages and conditions, which in the long-term would make public employment a less attractive option for bright young Indonesians. This was a constant argument of unions as different as the teachers' unions and the association for government officials, Perhimpunan Pegawai Bestuur Bumiputera.[44] In a speech to the PVPN Congress at the end of 1931, Surjopronoto spoke of the humiliation felt by Indonesians because Eurasians were paid much higher wages for doing the same work, arguing that, "Every native civil servant … must buy a newspaper, dress in expensive

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[42] See, statement of Kiewiet de Jonge to the *Volksraad*, quoted in *Het Postblad*, January 1931, p. 9.

[43] Kiewiet de Jonge's explanation to the *Volksraad* is printed in *Het Postblad*, December 1930, pp. 194–195.

[44] The prominent Indies social-democrat J.E. Stokvis was also concerned about government policy which, he argued, in effect looked to Indianise the salary scales of public officials. While he was not opposed to Indianisation, he believed that the way it was being implemented would lead to a lowering of the educational standards of the government service: "Indianisation, which is better described as nationalisation, could eventually lead to there being a completely second-rate, nationalised, typically-Indies corps of civil servants, above which reigns a small, high level and select groups of Europeans. The European top will be absolutely essential for leadership because the standard of the other group is so deeply flawed." He urged a broadening and deepening of western education in the colony if Indianisation was to be achieved. See, *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 August 1932, quoting *Groene Amsterdammer*, 7 July 1932.

clothes, send children to school, ride a bicycle, no differently from an Indo-European."[45]

Suroso attacked the report in the Volksraad, at public meetings and in the press. He totally rejected arguments put forward for the retention of a separate scale for Eurasians, stating that, "The salaries commission has accepted the fact that living standards of Indonesians are lower than those of Europeans born here. However, this is unjust."[46] A separate wage scale for Eurasians, he asserted, would continue to restrict Indonesians to lower wages, despite many of them having studied for longer or working alongside them in the same jobs:

> The standard of living of people of every nationality in this country should not be determined by the criteria of nationality, but by the educational level of each individual employee.[47]

The Indonesian labour movement, he said, demanded a single wage scale for government employees, based solely on qualifications and function. The only exceptions should be for a small number of people with specialist skills who had to be recruited from overseas. But even this should only be a temporary measure. Suroso argued that the government should put more money into developing the high school system for Indonesians and establishing an indology and literature faculty for eastern languages, an agricultural high school and a military training school. If it did this as a matter of priority then Indianisation of the public service would proceed quickly and there would be no further need to recruit from overseas.[48]

The recommendations of successive reports from the Salaries Commissions in the 1930s continued to be attacked by Indonesian labour and political leaders because they maintained the race-based wages system and used Indianisation as an excuse to suppress the wages of Indonesians. In a play on the abbreviation for the salary regime, one Indonesian newspaper stated that the BBL stood for "Berilah Belanda Lebih!" (Give the Dutch More!).[49] Two years later, when further cuts were proposed, the BBL was described as an acronym for "Bankrutnja Bumiputera 'sLandsdienaren" (Bankrupting native civil servants).[50] Unions argued that a better solution

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45 "Indianisatie", *Orgaan SPGHB*, January 1932, p. 9.

46 Quoted in *Het Postblad*, December 1930, p. 192.

47 Quoted in *Het Postblad*, January 1931, p. 8.

48 "De aanstaande herziening van de BBL. Naar de Indianisatie?", *Persatoean Sekerdja*, 15 May 1931, pp. 17–22.

49 *Sipatahoenan*, 3 June 1930, in *IPO*, 1930/2, p. 411.

50 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 22 December 1933.

would be to dissolve tier B into tier A and raise the tier A salaries across the board.[51]

The reports of the Salaries Commission and the Indianisation policy were not just opposed by Indonesian labour unions. European labour unions were also critical, reflecting the Eurasian community's nervousness about its future in the colony. They feared that the Depression had enabled the government to make cuts which would be in force long after the crisis was over. The Indo-European Association Congress in April 1931 protested at the government's intended wage cuts, its reclassification of jobs and the policy of Indianisation. Its chairman stated that, "… the IEV will refuse to cooperate in implementing this reduction, which should be seen as a way of pushing the Indo out in favour of Native workers."[52]

The *Indische Courant*, generally a reasoned voice for the Eurasian community, also expressed concern throughout the 1930s about the consequences of implementing the Salaries Commission recommendations. It was realistic enough to see that the changes in 1931 were just the beginning and that in succeeding years more and more tier B jobs would be re-classified as tier A. The implication was that Eurasians and Indies-born Europeans would be reduced to a native standard of living. "Is it responsible", it asked, "given that the savings are so little, to make the future of the upcoming generation of Europeans so much more gloomy?"[53]

This critique of Indianisation was a constant theme of European labour unions throughout the 1930s. The Spoorbond, for example, rejected the idea that the policy had anything to so with Ethical ideas of uplifting the natives. It was simply a government slogan to disguise a policy of reducing European wages to native levels. Indianisation should mean something very different. It should mean natives working alongside Europeans, not replacing them, in an expanding economy that provided them with new opportunities rather than reducing the opportunities for Europeans:

> The slogan 'Indianisation' is misused when what the government really wants is to produce a budget outcome. What it will achieve, if successful, will not be 'Indianisation', but a lowering of living standards and a reduction in welfare. 'Indianisation' will actually be slowed down by this.[54]

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[51] See, for example, *Persatoean Goeroe*, 15 June 1930, in *IPO*, 1930/28, p. 165.

[52] *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 15 April 1931, quoting a report in the *Indische Courant* of 7 April.

[53] *Indische Courant*, 3 October 1930, quoted in *Het Postblad*, November 1930, p. 172.

[54] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 May 1931, p. 323.

There was little sympathy for the Eurasian community from Indonesian circles. The editor of the *Het Postblad*, the magazine of the union for middle level post and telegraph workers, stated bluntly:

> The Indo's must, in their own interest, choose our side. If they do not, then they will eventually put themselves into a tight corner. It is to be hoped that they will see reality.[55]

Surjopranoto was even more blunt, stating that while he was not being critical of Eurasians, they always wanted to be the master, were ashamed to stand side by side with Indonesians and were averse to physical labour. The solution, he believed, was for them to become totally absorbed into Indonesian society.[56]

With its Indianisation policy the colonial government antagonised the western-educated Indonesian elite, and both the Indies-born European and Eurasian communities. It brought divergent social and economic interests into the open and made cooperation between Indonesian and European labour unions more difficult. While they could work together in a limited way during the worst of the Depression years neither group fully trusted the other.

Amidst the gloom induced by the Depression, the labour movement celebrated a victory in November 1931 when the government introduced legislation to establish a widows' pension for its Indonesian employees. For more than a decade Indonesian labour unions, supported by the VVL, had demanded that Indonesian employees have the same entitlements as Europeans. In 1927 the government announced its agreement in principle, but it took another five years and continued pressure from Indonesian and European labour unions for the undertaking to be realised. The scheme introduced from January 1932 was limited to Indonesian employees earning 50 guilders a month or more. An estimated 33,000 Indonesians stood to benefit. Left out was the larger group of 60,000 who earned less than 50 guilders a month.[57]

Indonesian labour unions welcomed the scheme but objected to the fund excluding low paid workers. They also objected to the continued discrimination against Indonesians: the fund made no provision for Indonesian orphans, as it did for Europeans, even though Indonesians were

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[55] *Het Postblad*, August 1930, p. 80.

[56] Surjopranoto, "Indo-Europeanen en Indonesier", *Pahlawan*, 10 May 1931, in *IPO*, 1931/25, pp. 517–518.

[57] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 December 1930, 16 January and 16 August 1931.

required to contribute five per cent of their wages to the fund, the same as Europeans. Moreover, whereas the widow's pension for Europeans was 22.5 per cent of monthly wages, for Indonesians it was only 18 per cent.[58]

Differential benefits for widows and orphans was only one of the many ways in which the wages and conditions of public employees discriminated against Indonesians. In October 1932 Suroso wrote to the Governor-General once again raising the issue of child allowances for Indonesian public sector workers. He complained about the definition of children covered by the child allowance provisions and its discrimination between Christians and Europeans on the one hand and Muslims on the other hand. Under the regulations, a child allowance was paid to Indonesian non-Christian employees who were legally married, but those who had legally married more than once were restricted to child allowances for children from the first marriage only. However, for Europeans and Christian Indonesians the regulations covered all children from one or more legal marriage. Suroso did not object to the rule that if a Muslim had more than one wife only the children of the first wife would be covered, but objected to the fact that if the first wife died and there were children from a second marriage then no child allowance was payable for these children. For Indonesian labour union leaders this was just one more example of an unfair and racially discriminatory colonial system.[59] The labour unions and Indonesian member of the Volksraad continued to pressure the government throughout the 1930s for equal benefits irrespective or race or religion.

Unions and the Depression

Labour unions throughout the world were on the defensive during the Depression years. A sense of hopelessness was evident as each day tens of thousands of wage earners lost their jobs, well aware that they had little prospect of re-employment any time soon. In the towns and cities of colonial Indonesia, as in the western world, ordinary people struggled to understand the economic forces impacting their lives. Survival was on the top of their minds. Strikes were out of the question when employers could

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[58] "Het Vraagstuk van een Weduwen- en Wezenfonds voor niet-Europese Landsdienaren" by the VVL, *De Indische Vakbeweging*, I May 1938, pp. 10–15 and I June 1938, pp. 18–24. See, also *Spoorbond's Blad* 16 January 1930, 1 December 1930, 16 August 1931.

[59] Suroso (chairman) and Djojodihardjo (secretary) PVPN to Governor-General, 10 November 1932 and Government Secretary to PVPN, 13 December 1932, reprinted in *Het Postblad*, May 1933, pp. 72–73.

replace labour easily. Even in strongly unionised western countries the strike was a much less useful weapon in the face of an army of unemployed. In colonial Indonesia the space for worker action was more restricted. There was, of course, no democracy, let alone labour parties in parliament. Strikes were banned, public meetings tightly controlled, the press restricted and the right of association for labour unions and nationalist parties dependent on the whim of the state and its local officials. Despite these restrictions, there was still some space in which Indonesian labour unions could organise workers, represent their interests to employers and government, and provide a measure of social security through the creation of cooperatives and mutual benefit funds. Negotiating this space, narrow though it was, and keeping the state at bay were the major challenges for labour union leaders.

At the end of 1931, there were 46 registered Indonesian labour unions with a total membership of 75,485. It is impossible to get precise figures, but probably 80–90 per cent were in unions for public sector workers. Many of these unions were small: there were, for example, separate unions for municipal workers in Surabaya, Semarang and Batavia and three different unions for workers in the post office. Membership figures also included members of the large association for Indonesians who staffed the colonial bureaucracy. The Perhimpunan Pegawai Bestuur Bumiputera (PPBB), had around 5,000 members but it rarely saw itself as part of the labour movement, rather as an association for those who administered the country.[60] There were also strong unions for Indonesian military and naval personnel and for Indonesian policemen, all of which were careful to distance themselves from civil unions. About 60 per cent of the members of Indonesian labour unions were in unions affiliated with one of the two federations. The largest was the PVPN, which had 12 member unions with a total membership of 37,710, including the federation of teacher unions, the PGHB, which had four member unions with a total membership of 12,060. The

[60] The membership figure is quoted in the PPBB journal, *Pemimpin*, September 1930, in *IPO*, 1930/44, p. 183. The approach of the PPBB is well illustrated by the speech of its chairman and Volksraad member, Wiranatakusumo, who told delegates to its 1932 Congress that "… in Native society we are a group which knows its place, a group which for centuries has served the general interest and promoted order, peace and welfare." Quoted in, *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 11 October 1932. For a dscussion of the Javanese bureacratic elite and the PPBB see, Heather Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite* (Singapore: Heinemann, 1979), pp. 113–129.

second federation was the Surabaya-based PSSI, which had 5,251 members in affiliated private sector unions.[61]

Indonesian labour unions had worked hard to rebuild the confidence of urban workers after the failed strikes of the early 1920s and the destruction of the PKI. Much of this hard work was undone by the Depression. By 1936 Indonesian unions had lost more than half of their membership. Loss of members meant sharp falls in revenue, which forced a pruning of costs. Magazines were published less frequently, central offices moved to smaller premises and the number of paid officials reduced. Union leaders were again forced to reassess their strategies for recruiting and holding members when urban unemployment was rising and many of those who kept their jobs were struggling with lower wages and allowances. Most decided to intensify their economic and social activities, including cooperatives and savings societies. Not all agreed with this increased focus on economic and social activities. Some union leaders continued to argue that labour unions had to behave like labour unions, defending workers' wages and conditions, and not like cooperatives. The majority, though, argued that an increased emphasis on social and economic activities was important to sustain workers' lives at a time of crisis and to maintain workers' confidence in unions. More broadly, there was a growing conviction that Indonesians needed to be more self-reliant by developing social and economic institutions independent of the colonial state or foreign capital. In the words of the editor of the Surabaya-based PSSI journal, "… because I am convinced that by moving in this direction employers will not be able to hinder our efforts to improve workers' destiny."[62] The main nurses' union was just as convinced: "Who else will improve our national economy other than us working together?"[63]

Pawnshop Workers

The Yogyakarta-based pawnshop workers' union (PPPH) was at the centre of the opposition to the colonial government's economy measures. The pawnshop service began to reduce its workforce in the last half of 1929. Permanent workers were not replaced as they retired or resigned, fewer temporary workers were employed and workers were required to work

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61 *Indische Verslag* 1932, Vol. 1, pp. 329–330.
62 *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 31 July 1931.
63 *Soeara PKVB*, January 1932.

longer hours.[64] The Depression led to four mass redundancies. The first was announced in October 1931, for implementation in early 1932. The government had already stated that public sector wages would be cut by 10 per cent from January 1932 and that there would be significant reductions in allowances, leave entitlements and pensions. The pawnshop service informed the PPPH that because the number of pawned items had dropped 15 per cent in 1931, and was expected to drop even further in 1932, some 885 workers were no longer needed. Temporary workers would be the first to go, followed by older workers who were unlikely to be promoted any further or were considered unsuitable for the jobs they had. If this did not achieve the required numbers, then, in accordance with a government circular to all departments and government industries, it would dismiss married women who were not the sole wage earner in their family.[65]

The PPPH executive held a series of meetings with pawnshop service management in October and November but got little satisfaction. By November, union branches were reporting that pawnshop controllers were forcing Indonesian workers to sit tests and using the results to determine who would be dismissed. An extraordinary Congress was called for 7 December in Yogyakarta to plan a stepped-up campaign. Martodiredjo, the union secretary, told delegates that the union would take the government to Court if it dismissed workers on the grounds of unsuitability rather than making them redundant.[66] Tjokroaminoto criticised the unfairness of lower level workers being dismissed while highly paid European workers were retained. He looked forward to the complete Indianisation of the public sector so that there would no longer be such high salaries for those at the top. Salim told delegates that one reason for the decline in government revenues was that large capital was not sufficiently taxed:

> The current way of economising is like a farmer who milks his cow frequently but gives it less food. The consequences will be an increase in the number of people in jails and hospitals.[67]

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[64] *Doenia Pegadaian*, May-June 1930.

[65] See, "Ontslag personeel bij den Pandhuisdienst als gevolg van belangrijke afname van het debiet", enclosed in Head of Pawnshop Service to Director of Finance, 24 December 1931, in V 24 March 1932–14, NA.

[66] Martodiredjo had been a chief valuer until 'honourably discharged' in November 1922, shortly after the failed pawnshop workers' strike. See, Head of Pawnshop Service to Director of Finance, 22 July 1932, V 25 April 1933–1, NA.

[67] "Verslag van de door de Perserikatan Pegawai Pegadaian Hindia (PPPH) gehouden vergadering te Jogjakarta op den 7/8 December 1931", enclosed in Adviser for Native Affairs to Governor-General, 19 December 1931, V 24 March 1932–12, NA. This file contains extensive

The Congress decided to hold a day of protest meetings, seek the support of the Netherlands Federation of Labour Unions (NVV) and appeal to sympathetic Dutch socialists to raise the issue in the Netherlands Lower House. Dozens of protest meetings were organised by PPPH branches in major towns in Java on 20 December.[68] The following day Suroso tabled a question in the Volksraad seeking details from the government about the dismissals and raising the issue of arbitrary behaviour by pawnshop controllers. The Governor-General sought assurances from the Director of Finance that the redundancies were being carried out with due process and that there would be no arbitrary dismissals. The Adviser for Native Affairs, Gobee, was so concerned about the anger among pawnshops workers that he reminded the Governor-General, in somewhat alarmist terms, "… to what the revolutionary turbulence of 1926 has taught us, namely that discontented and rebellious personnel are susceptible to propaganda from similar rebellious movements."[69]

The Governor-General granted the PPPH executive an audience on 30 December, itself an indication of his concern about the impact of the union campaign. The union argued that job reductions should be carried out through natural attrition rather than forced redundancies and complained that the pawnshop service was inflating the number of excess workers by continually increasing the annual workload of each worker.[70] In 1921 a worker was required to process 8,000 items. This was increased to 10,000 items after the 1922 strike. From 1932 they were required to process 12,000 items. The working day had also been lengthened. Pawnshop workers, it argued, were being paid less and expected to work harder over longer hours.[71]

In early January 1932, the PPPH executive restated its case to the Governor-General and again urged him to avoid mass redundancies. This time it tried to bolster its case with the broader argument that Indonesians joined

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reports on representations from the PPPH between September and December 1931 and on its campaign.

[68] See, *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 December 1931.

[69] Adviser for Native Affairs to Governor-General, 19 December 1931, V 24 March 1932–14, NA.

[70] See, Government Secretary to central executive of the PPPH, 26 February 1932, enclosed in V 25 March 1933–1, NA.

[71] "Report on a meeting between the central executive of the PPPH and the head of the pawnshop service on 21 November 1931", *Doenia Pegadaian* 25 November 1931. The number of pawned items per worker was increased again in 1933 to 15,000. *Doenia Pegadaian*, 10 November 1933.

the public service to serve loyally government and people, and did so in the belief that they were entering a lifetime job. The mass redundancies had destroyed these expectations, causing anxiety and anger not just among pawnshop workers but also among all public sector workers who now feared for their future:

> A position in government service, Excellency, has long been considered as a lifelong position. This is the reason for the complete loyalty and dedication of civil servants, and particularly the Native officials and lower level employees in the pawnshops. Their own lives, the education of their children and their ability to fulfil their responsibilities to families and relatives have rested on certainty of employment and assured promotion, provided they are loyal and fulfil their duties[72]

The PPPH campaign failed to stop the redundancies, forcing the union to shift its attention to ensuring that they were implemented fairly and that it got the best possible compensation for workers. The pawnshop service was trying to reduce the cost of redundancies by ordering pawnshop controllers to introduce snap tests for permanent workers and then dismiss those who failed on the grounds of "unsuitability for service". The potential financial savings were substantial. A permanently employed pawnshop worker on being made redundant was legally entitled to be placed on wachtgeld (unemployment pay) of 80 per cent of his wages for the first three months, followed by 60 per cent for up to a further 21 months, and then 40 per cent for a further three years. However, if the grounds for dismissal were "unsuitability for service", the unemployment pay was reduced to one-third of wages for one year only. Temporary workers made redundant were entitled to no compensation.[73]

The PPPH executive toured the pawnshops urging workers to stand up for their rights and support the union campaign. It believed that in a further attempt to save money there was a pattern of younger, lower paid workers being made redundant, while older, higher paid workers were deemed unsuitable for service.[74] This was precisely what was happening. Pawnshops in the Semarang Residency were typical. Of the 136 workers made redundant, 92 were classified as unsuitable for service, most of whom were

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[72] Memorandum from the PPPH executive, n.d. (early January 1932), in V 24 March 1932 – 14, NA.

[73] Ibid. and *Doenia Pegadaian*, 5 January 1932.

[74] H.A. Salim, "Kelepasan Ramai (massa ontslag) dan Pergeraken PPPH", *Doenia Pegadaian*, 5 February 1932.

long-standing workers in responsible positions.[75] The PPPH accused controllers of asking trick questions or questions that workers' could never be expected to be able to answer. It complained to the Governor-General that "idiotic" questions were deliberately being asked.[76] It accused some controllers of making too many workers redundant so that they could employ additional temporary workers on lower wages. The union successfully protested many of these cases to local inspectors. The fate of dismissed temporary workers was of particular concern. The union formally requested the government to pay six weeks wages to these workers, even though it was not legally required to do so.[77]

The Volksraad debated the mass dismissals on 4 February 1932, with the government coming under fire from Indonesian members, led by Suroso. Pressure from the PPPH, Indonesian members of the Volksraad, and the NVV in the Netherlands forced some concessions. The government agreed to the PPPH request for payment of six weeks wages to redundant temporary workers, allowed permanent workers made redundant on grounds of unsuitability to appeal to the pawnshop service inspectors, and undertook to establish an Appeals Commission to consider appeals from decisions of the inspectors. Moreover, the PPPH was invited to nominate four senior Indonesian pawnshop workers from whom the government would name two to be members of the Commission. The majority of those dismissed on grounds of "unsuitability for service" won their appeals and were instead made redundant.

The PPPH saw its success in forcing concessions from the government as proof that a well organised public campaign could achieve results. Tjokroaminoto, its patron, proudly listed the PPPH achievement in mitigating the worst aspects of the redundancies. The result, he proclaimed, was that thousands of guilders extra would be paid in compensation to dismissed workers.[78] In a lengthy article Salim argued that the government's concessions demonstrated that workers must be organised and that their organisations must be strong.[79] Members were urged to discuss the crisis in the

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[75] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 February 1932. Among them were 9 chief valuers, 10 valuers, 14 head cashiers and 36 cashiers.

[76] Head of the Pawnshop Service to Residents of Buitenzorg, Semarang and Surabaya, 10 October 1932, in V 25 March 1933–1, NA.

[77] See, article by H.A. Salim, "Kelepasan Ramai (massa ontslag) dan Pergeraken PPPH", *Doenia Pegadaian*, 5 February 1932.

[78] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 July 1932.

[79] H.A. Salim, "Kelepasan Ramai (massa ontslag) dan Pergeraken PPPH", *Doenia Pegadaian*, 5 February 1932.

pawnshops at local branch meetings before the upcoming PPPH Congress in the middle of the year when the union would determine further action[80]

Despite its success in getting workers a better deal, the PPPH could not prevent the pawnshop service going ahead with the redundancies, nor could it stop three further redundancies. It struggled in the Depression years. Its membership dropped to 1,784 at the end of June 1933.[81] It responded to the four mass redundancies between 1932 and 1934 by establishing a support fund for the unemployed. Members were asked to pay five guilders into the fund so that the 885 workers dismissed in January 1932 could each draw at least 30 guilders from it, with the surplus used for future emergencies. Only about half of the members responded, forcing the union to reduce payments to those who had been dismissed. In July 1932 a further call was made for two guilders each so that the 492 workers made redundant in June could be paid 15 guilders each. Again, only about half responded, forcing a reduction in payments to only seven and a half guilders for each redundant member. Pawnshop workers found the extra demands too burdensome. The union was forced to terminate the fund in August 1933 with members made redundant as a result of the third and fourth mass dismissals no longer able to obtain support from the fund.[82]

The PPPH death benefits fund also had problems meeting its obligations during the Depression.[83] In January 1934 there was a crisis in the fund. The fund's investments were based on maintaining sufficient liquidity to cover payouts to no more than seven deceased members' families each year and to cover withdrawals from members who left the industry.[84] In January 1934, four members died with the result that the fund had insufficient liquidity to make the required payments and at the same time to enable 200 recently redundant workers to withdraw their money as they were entitled to do. The fund announced that it would only be able to pay half the sum to which each person was entitled, promising to pay the remainder within three months.[85] The dismissal of one-third of the pawnshop workforce during the Depression years could not have been predicted when the death benefits fund was created. Despite the temporary liquidity problem, the death benefit fund was important to union members and they continued

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80 *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 April 1932.
81 *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 August 1933.
82 *Doenia Pengadaian*, 25 January and 25 December 1932, 25 August 1933.
83 *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 March 1938.
84 *Persatoean Sekerdja*, April 1931.
85 *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 May 1934.

to contribute. In 1938, the union estimated that 83 per cent of its members were also members of the death benefit fund.[86]

The July 1932 Congress of the PPPH elected Dr Sukiman Wirjosandjojo as its chairman to replace Surjopranoto who had decided that his other commitments made it impossible for him to devote the required attention to the union. Sukiman operated a private medical practice in Yogyakarta. In the Netherlands he had been a member of the Indonesian students' association, Perhimpunan Indonesia, and was a close friend of Mohammad Hatta and Sutan Sjahrir with whom he shared broad social-democratic convictions. Sukiman had returned to Indonesia in 1926, joined Sarekat Islam and tried to reform it, including working to persuade it that Muslims were not threatened by an independent Indonesia being a secular state. One of the advantages of Sukiman becoming chairman was that because of his private income he did not require a salary from the union at a time when loss of members had forced the PPPH to curtail activities and reduce paid staff.

The difficulties of managing a union which had lost half its membership and income in just two years was compounded by an internal leadership dispute between Sukiman and Surjopranoto on the one hand and Martodiredjo, Drijowongso and Tjokroaminoto on the other hand.[87] The dispute revolved around accusations that Martodiredjo had misused PPPH funds, though it was fundamentally about Martodiredjo's opposition to the use of the PPPH fighting fund to purchase *Moestika* and its printery from Sukiman.[88] Sukiman and Surjopranoto announced that the PPPH would expel Martodiredjo, and carried out a referendum of members in January 1933 which supported this decision. Martodiredjo was close to Tjokroaminoto and a fellow member of the Partai Sarekat Islam leadership, which resulted in Tjokroaminoto publicly declaring the PPPH expulsion illegal. The PPPH retaliated by terminating Tjokroaminoto from his position as patron and removing Reksodiputro from the union executive. The PSI then re-

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[86] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 December 1939.

[87] Drijowongso had been dismissed from the pawnshop service in February 1922 during the failed pawnshop workers' strike. See, Head of Pawnshop Service to Director of Finance, 22 July 1932, V 25 April 1933–1, NA.

[88] See, for example, *Soeara Oemoem*, 21 January 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/4, p. 65; *Sin Po*, 18 January 1933, in *IPO*, 1933, 4, p. 50 and *Keng Po*, 17 January 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/4, p. 51 and 'Doenia PPPH', *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 31 January 1933.

taliated by expelling Sukiman and Surjopranoto, and Tjokroaminoto unsuccessfully suing the PPPH for loss of income and reputation.[89]

This personal dispute distracted attention from the problems faced by the PPPH. For some time Sukiman had been concerned that the Depression would cause workers' to forget their responsibilities to work together to improve their conditions. He feared that the Indonesian people were becoming demoralised by the Depression. He hoped to counter this demoralisation by using the resources of the PPPH to create a new newspaper devoted to the long-term process of educating workers' about their rights and the value of collective action.'[90]

A 'Workers' Press'

Sukiman was a major shareholder in a company established in Yogyakarta in 1931 to publish a daily newspaper, *Moestika*.[91] Haji Agus Salim was its editor and many of its financial supporters were prominent in the Yogyakarta branch of the PSI. Although Salim described *Moestika* as a newspaper for Indonesian Muslims, it did not use religious language or symbols in its reporting or its appeals for workers' support. Nor did it promote the PSI, though it did provide coverage of PSI created labour unions. Symbolically, its first issue appeared on 1 May 1931 and included a leading article from Salim on the significance of May Day, which he described as the "festivity of the oppressed."[92]

Salim had been one of the key leaders in Sarekat Islam's struggles against the PKI in the early 1920s for control of the labour movement. While fervently anti-communist, like fellow PSI leaders Sukiman and Surjopranoto he believed that labour unions must be class based. He had publicly rebuked the Surabaya branch of the PSI when in April 1929 it proposed creating labour unions based on Islam. Indonesian labour unions, he argued, must unite all workers against employers and capital, irrespective of their religion or nationality. He did not want to see Indonesia emulate the Netherlands, where labour unions were organised along the lines of religious

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89 See: Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 139; *Doenia Pegadaian*, 5–25 February, 25 March and 10 July 1933. Interestingly, two-thirds of the PPPH membership voted, with overwhelming support for the action of the central executive. *Doenia Pegadaia*n, 25 February 1934.

90 "Werkloos—"Bahaja demoralisatie ra'jat!!", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 16 September 1932.

91 *Pewarta Soerabaja*, 4 October 1930, in *IPO*, 1930/42, p. 118.

92 *Moestika*, 1 May 1931.

affiliation.[93] He reiterated these views in a speech at a public meeting organised as part of the PSI Congress in Yogyakarta in January 1930. Labour unions, he stated must be separate from political parties.[94] Occasional voices were raised in PSI branches in the early 1930s calling for Muslim labour unions, but Salim, Surjopranoto and Sukiman would have none of it.[95]

Immediately after becoming chairman of the PPPH, Sukiman persuaded the union to purchase *Moestika* and its associated printery in order to convert it into what he described as a "workers' press."[96] *Moestika* was carrying considerable debt, much of which was owed by Sukiman personally.[97] Purchase by the PPPH removed the debt and provided valuable institutional backing.

Sukiman assembled an impressive Board, including Surjopranoto from the PPPH, Suroso from the PVPN and Sjahrir, who had returned to Indonesia from the Netherlands in January 1932 to provide direction to the PNI Baru.[98] Sukiman had kept in contact with Hatta in the Netherlands and had probably discussed with both him and Sjahrir his plans for the creation of a 'workers' press'. He was aware of Hatta's opposition to Partindo, the replacement for the banned PNI, and it is highly likely that he was in contact with some of the leaders of the Independent Groups that emerged in 1931, and which by December 1931 had created the PNI Baru. He saw himself as a bridge between Hatta and Sukarno, in large part because he still saw the potential for the federation of political parties, the PPPKI, to be a unifying force in the nationalist movement and for this he needed the active support of both Partindo and PNI Baru. Nevertheless, he was personally more sympathetic to PNI Baru. The position of the 'workers' press' on both labour union and political issues was in keeping with the ideas promoted by the PNI Baru.

Hatta returned to Indonesia at the end of August after an absence of eleven years. He quickly assumed leadership of PNI Baru. The first issue of

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[93] See, *Fadjar Asia*, 4 April 1929 and a leading article "PSI dengan kaoem boeroeh", *Fadjar Asia*, 3 July 1929.

[94] See, PPO, January 1930 in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934.

[95] Salim's relationships with Sukiman and Surjopranoto broke down in 1933 after he sided with those in the PSI who moved to expel them from the party.

[96] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 5–25 August 1932.

[97] Sukiman may have had financial problems which caused him to persuade the PPPH to buy *Moestika*. He had borrowed 16,000 guilders for his share of the company and in 1932 still owed at least 8,000 guilders.

[98] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 2 September 1932.

Oetoesan Indonesia (Indonesian Messenger) appeared at the beginning of September with Sukiman as editor. Within a few days readers were informed that from 1 November Hatta would join Sukiman as co-editor. Hatta saw *Oetoesan Indonesia* as an important vehicle for reviving the labour movement, which he compared adversely to the labour movement he had known in the Netherlands:

> *Oetoesan Indonesia* is a daily paper with a radical spirit, that is the nature of our newspaper. It is not a party paper: if it was a party paper then Dr Sukiman and I would not be the editors. ...
>
> In keeping with its stance as a radical paper, *Oetoesan Indonesia* will strive to develop a radical spirit in the labour movement, a spirit that is very badly needed at the moment.[99]

Despite arguing that *Oetoesan Indonesia* was not linked to any political party, but was a critical voice advocating workers' rights and opposing the government's economy measures, in the eyes of other nationalists Hatta's co-editorship did directly link the newspaper to the PNI Baru. The link also attracted the close attention of colonial officials who saw the newspaper as blurring the line between labour union and political activity.

In August, as the newly appointed chairman of the PPPH, Sukiman toured Java in an effort to revive union branches and promote the new newspaper. By the end of the month 500 pawnshop workers, or about one-third of the total PPPH membership, were reported to have subscribed.[100] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, Sukiman told a Surabaya meeting of the PPPH, was "a weapon of the workers." Indonesian workers were urged to read it each day and to unite in order to increase their power against employers.[101]

Sukiman wanted *Oetoesan Indonesia* to be a window onto the modern world for Indonesian workers. He was a frequent contributor, with articles placing the struggles of Indonesian workers and labour unions in the context of the universal conflict between capital and labour. He spoke of the failure of the colonial state to protect workers through social laws and the weakness of labour unions in Indonesia. There was, he argued too much talk in the labour movement and not enough action. He did not advocate strikes—he knew that strikes were impossible given the colony's Criminal Code—but he did advocate public protest. He believed that even in a colony as repressive as Indonesia, public protests could exert moral pressure

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[99] Leading article in *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 10 November 1932.

[100] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 August 1933.

[101] He used this phrase in a speech at a Surabaya meeting of the PPPH. See, *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 August 1932.

on the state. In announcing that the PPPH would hold protest meetings throughout the country in December 1932, he argued that, "Clearly, at this time in order to achieve its desired outcome the PPPH movement can only be involved in protest and in influencing public opinion, on moral pressure from the crowd, because all other ways are definitely closed."[102]

In his writings and speeches Sukiman emphasised that while labour unions should be structurally separate from political parties this did not mean that unions should not be concerned with politics. He frequently pointed to the European model where labour unions were independent but also used the electoral system to get their own representatives into parliament. He was clearly frustrated at the weakness of the Indonesian labour movement. In October he described it as sick, going on to criticise the political parties for their inability to provide support to the unemployed and to praise Sukarno and Semaun for understanding the links between economics and politics.[103]

Surjopranoto was also a regular contributor to *Oetoesan Indonesia*. In an early article he described it as heralding a new phase in the development of the Indonesian labour movement, leading a renewed effort to unite workers into one organisation. In late 1932 he used its pages to accuse the Salaries Commission of planning to lower the living standards of Indonesian workers permanently. He urged strong action from labour unions. Surjopranoto had been a strident critic of the Salaries Commission since its first report in 1925. He now feared that the union movement would fail to prevent further reductions in wages and conditions for government workers because it had become too much like a comfortable club. It must change direction and become more assertive:

> We are unable to find in our country a labour organisation which has become like a *banteng* [a wild Javanese buffalo]—powerful, repelling attackers and providing a place where its members are protected at a time of danger and difficulty—and which has a modern attitude and strength of purpose.

Like Sukiman, Hatta, Sjahrir and Sutomo, Surjopranoto viewed the development of labour unions in Indonesia through the prism of labour movements in Europe. In urging Indonesian unions to be more assertive he compared their weakness to the strength and unity in the Netherlands labour movement that, he informed his readers, had successfully opposed permanent cuts in public sector wages. He concluded that, "Our victory

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[102] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 2 December 1932.
[103] See, *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 29 October 1932.

depends on ourselves, on our courage, on surrendering ourselves to activity, sacrifice, effort, organisation".[104]

Oetoesan Indonesia's frequent criticism of the activities of other Indonesian organisations riled the Indonesian Study Club/PBI people in Surabaya who had been working for the past two years to create unions for the city's private sector workers. *Soeara Oemoem*, the voice of the Surabaya leaders, accused Sukiman of constantly changing his views: one moment, it argued, he was a cooperating nationalist leader of Sarekat Islam, then he was a Marxist and now he was a non-cooperating nationalist highly critical of co-operators. He was accused of being disrespectful of Indonesians with whom he disagreed. It spoke darkly of a "Yogyakarta group", accusing Sukiman of being under the influence of Hatta and advocating the views of the PNI Baru.[105] *Soeara Oemoem*'s criticism reflected the breakdown of cooperation in Surabaya in the last few months of 1932 as Partindo and PNI Baru began to organise their own unions and tried to take over PBI unions from the inside. Instead of moving towards greater unity the labour movement was once again fracturing.

Railway Workers

The railway workers' union, PBST, was one of the largest Indonesian unions, yet with just under 6,000 members in 1930 it represented only about 20 per cent of the Indonesian workforce in the State Railways. Its strength was in Bandung, Batavia and Surabaya, the three major centres for the State Railways. It had made negligible penetration into the two private railway networks based in Central Java. The arrest of PNI leaders at the end of December 1929, and police searches of the houses of some of its members who were also members of the PNI, caused the PBST central executive to worry that railway workers would become frightened and abandon it. In the early months of 1930 members of the executive visited all major branches to reassure railway workers that the PBST was not involved in politics, urging "Do not be afraid! The PBST is not political, rather it works to improve your livelihood along proper and lawful ways."[106]

The Spoorbond had sponsored the creation of the PBST for second class Indonesian railway workers and remained on good terms with it. At the

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104 "Kaum Buruh, Awas", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 6 October 1932.
105 R.T. Tjindarboemi, "Tidak sympathiek", *Soeara Oemoem*, 14 November 1932.
106 *Kareta Api*, March 1930.

end of 1929 it had 2,873 members, all of whom were middle level workers in the State Railways.[107] Most were Eurasians, but a small number of Indonesians who had been promoted to first class positions had also joined. In the middle of 1930, the State Railways announced that at the end of the year it would cease paying the annual 15 per cent living allowance and 8 per cent diligence bonus. The payments had been made since 1926 and had come to be regarded by railway workers as a normal part of their wages. The Spoorbond and the PBST joined forces in holding large public protest meetings in Bandung, Batavia and other railway towns. They were particularly incensed that after protests by the union for higher level railway workers, the State Railways had agreed to retain the allowances for those who earned over 1,000 guilders a month. Over 900 railways workers attended a noisy protest meeting in Bandung in October to hear rousing speeches from the chairmen of the two unions. Dutch newspapers reacted to the joint action by European and Indonesians labour unions by accusing their leaders of "demagoguery" and railway workers of being "troublemakers" and "lazy government workers". The Dutch press may have fulminated but the joint protest action was successful.[108]

The victory was short-lived. The allowances were abolished from 1932. Along with all government workers, State Railways workers also had their wages reduced by 10 per cent at the beginning of 1932 and a further 7 per cent at the beginning of 1933. The State Railways and the two private railway networks were badly hit by the collapse of export markets reducing freight haulage as well as by substantial reductions in passenger numbers as the Depression deepened. Under pressure on two fronts the railways reduced their labour force. Between 1930 and 1937 the State Railways reduced its total workforce from 44,089 to 28,532. In 1931 and 1932 alone it shed over 8,000 people, mostly lower level Indonesians. Over 16,000 lower level Indonesians, 35 per cent of the total lower level Indonesian workers in the State Railways, lost their jobs in the Depression years. Some had reached pensionable age, others were placed on unemployment pay (wachtgeld), but the vast majority were simply retrenched because they were temporary

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[107] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 February 1930. The Spoorbond membership represented about 60 per cent of the total middle level workers in the State Railways.

[108] The July 1930 issue of the *Maandblad*, the journal of the Vereeniging van Hoogere Ambtenaren (union of higher civil servants), took umbrage at the Spoorbond stating that higher level government workers were only concerned to protect their own interests and had no concern for middle and lower level workers. It accused the Spoorbond of seeking to sow mistrust between higher and lower level workers. *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 August 1930.

workers. Older workers fared particularly badly. They were the first to be retrenched because they were the most expensive to retain.

The PBST sought to mediate between State Railways management and its workers. In April 1931, management at the State Railways workshop in Bandung informed the PBST that it had 20 per cent more people than it needed and that there was a choice of cutting the number of hourly paid workers by 200 or reducing the hours of work from 45 to 37 hours a week. It proposed the latter course of action and sought the PBST's support. The PBST organised a meeting at the workshop where union chairman, Wiriaatmadja, himself a Bandung railwayman, spoke to the 600 workers who attended about the unfairness of the proposed cuts, particularly on low paid labourers. Nevertheless, the union preferred this course of action to one-third of workers losing their jobs entirely. Four workers stood up and addressed the meeting. All said they accepted that there had to be some cuts to hours of work and that this was much better than making another 200 people redundant but they believed that a cut of 17.5 per cent was too much. A cut of three hours a week would be more acceptable.[109] They received thunderous applause from the audience. The PBST agreed to take the issue up with the workshop management, but to no avail. Hourly paid workers in the State Railway workshop saw their 45 hours a week reduced first to 37 hours in 1931, then to 32 hours and finally to 22.5 hours a week at the beginning of 1934.[110]

On 1 January 1932 the PBST had 5,805 members in 72 branches, almost all in Java but with some on the west coast of Sumatra where the State Railways had a network to service the plantations. By 31 December its membership had more than halved to 2,459 in 38 branches and by December 1933 nearly halved again to 1,440 in 24 branches.[111] In his Annual Report for 1932, the union secretary acknowledged that many had stopped because they had been made redundant or had retired, and that many others could no longer afford the membership fees. However, he believed there were other deeper reasons, the most significant of which was that many railway and tramway workers had given up hope in the face of the Depression and no longer saw the value of a labour union. Yet others had lost faith in the

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[109] There is a report on the PBST meeting at the Bandung workshops on 9 April 1931 in *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 May 1931, pp. 287–289.

[110] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 February 1932 and 1 November 1933.

[111] Annual Report 1932, in *Kareta Api*, June 1933 and Annual Report 1933, in *Kareta Api*, May-June 1934.

PBST, believing that it was not radical enough, and had joined the Surabaya-based PBKI.[112]

Indeed, the PBST had come under criticism not just from its Surabaya-based rival but also from some of its branches for not doing enough to protect railway workers at a time of crisis. The union denied leadership failure, placing the blame on members. If they withdrew from the union or did not pay their membership fees regularly then union activities had to contract. In an announcement to members in January 1933 the PBST central executive acknowledged the dreadful impact of the Depression on railway and tramway workers, but urged them not to despair and to stick with the union.[113]

The PBST tried to retain railway workers' loyalty by supporting members and their families who were in need. Its magazine reported regularly on support provided to members by local branches as well as the central executive, hoping no doubt that this would persuade railway workers of the value of union membership. Letters of appreciation were published from grateful recipients. One member thanked the union for providing 44 guilders on the death of his son. A widow thanked the union for providing over 50 guilders on the death of her husband. Another member thanked the Bandung branch executive for forcing the State Railways to pay 158 guilders in wages owed to him.[114]

The union also established a series of mutual benefit funds. The most successful was a death benefits fund, established in 1931. Those who joined were required to pay 10 cents a month. On a member's death, the family would be paid 100 guilders. At the end of 1931 some 1,273 workers, or about one-third of the unions' financial membership, had joined. Despite its financial stress, the PBST preserved the death benefits fund and throughout the 1930s the fund's reserves were strong enough to fully meet its obligations. It also created a distress fund and a savings fund and tried to coordinate the small cooperatives created by local branches. The largest of these cooperatives, such as that in Bandung, had contracts with local businesses to provide members with discounts on a range of everyday needs.[115] The union was well aware that members who joined one of the mutual benefit funds were far more likely to keep up to date with their membership fees.

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[112] Annual Report 1932, in *Kareta Api*, June 1933.

[113] *Kareta Api*, January 1933.

[114] See, *Kareta Api*, October –November 1930 and December 1930.

[115] The 'SS Cooperatie West Lijn', which had branches in Bandung, Purwokerto and Batavia, had enrolled 40 shops in its cooperative. *Kareta Api*, September 1933.

Surabaya and Private Sector Workers

Despite the careful approach by the Indonesian Study Club, the government was concerned about the potential for Surabaya workers again to be involved in militant activity. It feared that the communist unions of the early 1920s had permanently radicalised Surabaya workers. It had intercepted the letter written by Sutomo in September 1929 to Husni Thamrin in which Sutomo had described the labour movement as part of the political struggle against the Dutch. This roused fears, never far below the surface, about the real purpose of nationalists' involvement in labour unions. The Attorney-General was particularly concerned about the international links of Indonesian labour unions through the International Transport Workers Federation and the Netherlands Federation of Labour Unions because this might embolden them to greater action in the belief that they had international support. While he believed that the PSSI lacked the ability, capacity or interest to fully develop its constituent unions nevertheless he concluded that "… the nature of some of the leaders, such as Dr. Sutomo and R.M. Surjopranoto, in my opinion provide no guarantee for a peaceful development."[116]

There were other more benign views within the government as officials tried to decide whether the renewed labour union activity in Surabaya was a threat to the state. In April 1931, the Acting Adviser for Native Affairs, Charles Van de Plas, compared the current activity with that of earlier unions led by the PKI and the SKBI. He believed that the new unions in Surabaya were in moderate hands, although he was concerned about the close working relations between the Study Club and what he regarded as the more dangerous PNI leaders in Surabaya.[117] This benign view of the Indonesian Study Club's labour union activities was to change as the Depression deepened and as it extended its influence from Surabaya into East Java.

PSSI-affiliated unions continued to growth rapidly in 1931, despite the impact of the Depression. By the end of 1931, they had 5,251 members.[118]

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[116] Attorney- General to Governor-General, 23 July 1930, Secret Mail Report 1930/727, NA.

[117] Mail Report 1931/642, NA. Van der Plas stated that "Speaking with R. Ruslan Wongsokusumo and acquiring information about the new labour newspaper [referring to *Soeara Oemoem*] has strengthened my conviction that the labour movement is in good hands and is being led with great seriousness and dedication."

[118] *Soeara PKVB*, June 1933, quoting figures released by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

This was a considerable achievement at a time when thousands of Surabaya private sector workers had lost their jobs and thousands of others were concerned about what the future held for them. In May the PSSI created the Sarekat Sekerja Indonesia (Indonesian Workers Union—SSI) as a general union for workers in companies and industries too small to justify individual unions. Within a month the SSI was reported to have recruited 250 members. Once again Ruslan Wongsokusumo was the chairman with the PNI Surabaya commissioner Rustamadji as treasurer and one other member of the PNI Surabaya on its executive.[119]

The growth of PSSI unions owed much to the organisational and financial support provided by the Indonesian Study Club and the energy of its key members. It also owed much to the emphasis on self-help. PSSI unions created savings societies, death benefit funds, pension funds and cooperatives, in an effort to soften the impact of the Depression on Surabaya workers. The Indonesian Study Club had transformed itself into the PBI in December 1930 and by the end of 1931 the PBI and PBI-affiliated unions controlled 35 cooperative savings groups in Surabaya. These cooperatives had 3,287 members, of whom two-thirds were people working for private companies and one-third were women.[120] The Sarekat Chauffeur Indonesia credit cooperative, for example, had grown from 13 members in April 1929 to 99 members at the end of 1931. During 1931 it received deposits of 1,664 guilders and at the end of the year had 515 guilders in reserves. In two and a half years it had lent almost 20,000 guilders to members at interest rates that it proudly proclaimed were much less than those charged by moneylenders.[121] The Surabaya branch of the PBKI was another union with significant mutual funds: at the end of 1931 it had a cooperative and a savings funds with reserves of 1,853 guilders.[122]

Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia was the voice of the PSSI. Like all labour union journals it published articles designed to educate workers about the meaning of labour unions within an international context and to encourage greater commitment. It also published detailed reports on individual union matters and regular reports of disputes between workers and employers,

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[119] PPO, April 1930, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 2, 1929–1930.

[120] At the end of 1931 these cooperative banks held 23,875 guilders. The occupations of the membership was traders 783, skilled workers 1007, workers (kaum buruh) 1244, government employees 139 and farmers 114. *Soeara Oemoem*, 6 May 1932.

[121] *Soeara Oemoem*, 3 February 1932. The cooperative did, however, note that it had problems with some members not repaying loans, mostly amounts borrowed to pay fines imposed by local Courts. *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 31 April 1931.

[122] *Soeara Oemoem*, 27 January 1932.

highlighting those where a union had successfully supported a member. In July 1931, a leading article tackled the assertion of some nationalists that many labour unions were so deeply involved in cooperatives that they no longer behaved like unions. It reminded readers that the origin of cooperatives in Indonesia was worker communities themselves and that cooperatives were important for workers to improve their lives and the lives of their families.[123]

Public meetings were held regularly in Surabaya and nearby towns. Urip Kasansengari, one of the most energetic of the PSSI propagandists, repeatedly assured well attended meetings that PSSI labour unions were solely concerned with protecting workers' wages and conditions and were not concerned with politics. At a meeting of sugar factory workers in February 1932, for example, he urged workers to overcome their fears and join the new union established for them by the PSSI, reminding them that the social laws in Europe which regulated working conditions, age pensions, invalidity pensions and sickness benefits, had only been achieved through workers' collective action.[124] Wherever they went, PSSI propagandists tried to overcome workers' fear of retribution from employers and convince them that the benefits of joining were worth the risk. It was easy to become frustrated and cynical. At a meeting in Cepu, where the Batavian Oil Company (BPM) was a major employer, a PSSI speaker lamented that despite the publicity about the meeting no BPM workers had turned up: "They are afraid of a good thing. Perhaps they are also afraid of later becoming rich. They therefore remain poor and miserable."[125] About the same time, Ruslan Wongsokusumo complained that there were too many people who joined a union hoping only for support and unwilling to work hard or make any sacrifices for its wider aims. Workers' expectations of their unions were such that "… whenever a member is unable to be helped or provided with mutual aid, reports are spread everywhere that the organisation is no good and should not be supported."[126]

Despite Ruslan's complaint, it was the promise of immediate benefits that attracted Surabaya workers to the new unions. The Sarekat Chauffeur Indonesia (SCI) was the first of the unions created by the Indonesian Study

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123 *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 31 July 1931.
124 *Soeara Oemoem*, 11 March 1932.
125 *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 14 March 1931.
126 *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 15 April 1931.

Club.[127] Its provision of financial services to members saw it quickly grow to over 250 Surabaya taxi drivers, with hundreds more enrolling in branches in other East Java towns.[128] By early 1931 it claimed a membership of 1,080. In 1932 it expanded into Central Java, with branches in Semarang and Surakarta, where it came into direct competition with the PSI union for taxi drivers.[129] Courses were held in Surabaya every fortnight, focussing on practical matters, such as how to drive carefully and how to avoid fines. It was also quick to support members when they got into difficulties. For example, Nitiasmora, a commissioner in the branch executive, was badly injured in a car accident. The SCI executive circulated members asking them to visit him in hospital. Shortly after Nitiasmora was released from hospital and returned to work his one-year old son died. It was a double tragedy for Nitiasmora because only a month earlier his six-year old son had also died. The branch organised hundreds of members to attend the burial of his son.[130] In such ordinary ways, the union sought to make itself an essential part of the life of Surabayan drivers.

The SCI called on lawyers in the Indonesian Study Club when a member needed legal support. In 1931, an SCI member named Dardjan collided with a bicycle while driving from Tuban to Surabaya. He turned to the SCI for help. He was referred to its legal adviser, Mr Suwono. The SCI then represented him in Court which found in his favour. The union even raised the cost of Dardjan travelling to Tuban for the Court hearing.[131] In another example, the SCI took to the local Court a case of three of its members dismissed without compensation. The Court awarded each of them one and half months' wages.[132] When in July 1932 the Probolinggo branch of the SCI successfully took up the case with an employer of a driver made redundant without compensation, the union proudly proclaimed that it

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[127] The grievances of taxi drivers were manifold. They complained of arbitrary treatment from the Surabaya police, including abusive language and of being regularly booked for transgressing regulations that they did not understand because they were in Dutch. Moreover, they complained of daily arrests for minor offences, such as having a broken light, speeding or using the horn too frequently, and of being fined or even imprisoned by the Courts without being able to defend themselves properly because the Court proceedings were beyond their understanding. See, *Fadjar Asia*, 12 March 1929 and Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p. 5.

[128] *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 31 April 1931.

[129] *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 31 August 1931 and PPO April and May 1932, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934.

[130] *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 31 April 1931.

[131] *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 15 July 1931.

[132] *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 15 September 1931.

was now clear "... that the SCI does not merely make a noise but also works."[133]

Not all union interventions were successful. In March 1931, 14 clerks employed by the Netherlands Steam Navigation Company in Surabaya refused to clean the office windows because they regarded such work as the work of labourers. The manager summoned the men and asked them one by one to do the work as ordered by their supervisor. They refused, with the result that they were suspended for seven days. On returning to work they were again instructed to clean the office windows and again refused. This time they were sacked. The clerks were all members of the Sarekat Sekerja Indonesia. The union took their case to the Surabaya Residency Court, where Urip Kasansengari argued that the clerks had been wrongfully dismissed and should be compensated by the payment of one and a half month's wages. He argued that they were not refusing to do their job, merely refusing to do work which was the job of a labourer. If they had agreed to clean the windows then they feared that later they would be required to clean doors, drains, bathrooms and other dirty places. This, he argued, was not work for clerks. A clerk was someone who engaged in written work, not cleaning windows. The claim for compensation was refused.[134]

The largest of the PSSI-affiliated unions was the OJS Bond Indonesia. It quickly expanded from its origin in the East Java Steam Tram Company in Surabaya to workers in the two Central Java-based private railway and tramway companies, the Sister Societies and the Netherlands Indies Railway Company. In August 1930 it changed its name to Persatuan Pegawai Partikelir Tramlijnen Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Workers in Private Tramways—PPPTI) to reflect its expanded role. A year later, in August 1931, it changed its name again to Persatuan Buruh Kareta Api Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Railway Workers—PBKI), indicating its intent to recruit

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133 *Soeara Oemoem*, 8 July 1932.

134 *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 31 March, 15 May and 15 September 1931.

The response of one of the clerks to the manager's request that he explain his action is instructive both on how the style of management affected workers' responses and the sense of obligation that many workers felt to their workplaces. The clerk acknowledged that he had cleaned windows on one previous occasion but stated that he would not do so again because he considered that it was not part of his duties. He gave as his reasons for cleaning the windows on the earlier occasion, "1. because I was asked in a polite way. 2. because I was asked to do this job for one occasion only. 3. because I had heard that the Inspector was coming from Batavia and I wanted to support the manager so that he received praise." *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 31 March 1931.

workers in the State Railways. In so doing it directly challenged the Bandung-based PBST which was dominated by workers in the State Railways.[135]

Sensing the danger, in July 1931 the Bandung executive of the PBST travelled to Surabaya for discussions with the executive of the PPPTI in an effort to find a way of bringing the competition to an end. The PBST had for some time being saying that it wanted to be a union for all railway and tramway workers, whether employed by the State Railways or the private companies. But the unity it wanted had to be on its terms. Its executive accused the PPPTI of creating schism in the labour movement, particularly by recruiting among PBST members in Surabaya and Central Java.[136] It insisted that because the PBST was the older organisation the PPPTI must accommodate itself to it. Unsurprisingly, this did not go down well with Rahardjo, the chairman of the PPPTI, who like many Surabaya political and labour union activists jealously guarded the independence of Surabaya. He responded that the PBST was an organisation for State Railways workers who were better paid and protected than workers in the private railways who therefore needed a union focussed on their needs.[137] The talks failed. At the end of August the PPPTI changed its name to PBKI and began to recruit in the State Railways in Surabaya.[138]

Reflecting its leaders involvement in the Indonesian Study Club/PBI, the PSSI became a partner in a scheme to resettle unemployed Surabaya workers on the land. A transmigration group (Perkumpulan Transmigratie Indonesia) had been established in Surabaya early in 1931. Its aim was to help resettle people from Surabaya kampung who were finding life tough because of the Depression.[139] The PSSI determined to work with the transmigration group, which was cooperating with a group at Banyuwangi that had targeted over 1,400 hectares of land at Bajulmati, about 24 kilometres away, which was unused and suitable for farming. A public meeting in Surabaya at the end of April 1931 saw 21 families register interest in moving out of the city to the new land. The PSSI then set about raising the money needed to purchase the land and cover transportation and establishment

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135 The extraordinary conference of the PBKI at Surabaya 22 May 1932 formally decided that the PBKI would seek to bring all rail and tram workers throughout Indonesia into the PBKI. *Soeara Oemoem*, 25 May 1932.

136 There was a report that members of the Yogyakarta branch of the PBST had received a circular from the PPPTI in Surabaya urging them to leave the PBST and establish a new union. *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 September 1930.

137 See report on the discussions in *Kareta Api*, September-October 1931.

138 PPO August 1931, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934.

139 *Soeara Oemoem*, 28 January 1932.

costs, estimated at around 150 guilders per family. Union members were urged to support the fund, and local businesses that had advertised in their magazines were solicited for donations. Union leaders acknowledged that the scheme could only assist a very small number of the urban unemployed, but saw it as an important part of their relief work. Over 1,000 guilders was raised by the end of June 1931, and in October PSSI leaders triumphantly announced that they had persuaded the East Java Provincial Council to provide the balance of 4,000 guilders needed to implement the project.[140]

In just over two years the Indonesian Study Club had successfully engaged with Surabaya private sector workers and persuaded significant numbers once again to join a union. Despite this success, its hope of creating a strong Surabaya-based labour union federation began to collapse in 1932. Considerable changes were taking place in the political landscape. The PNI had been dissolved and replaced by Partindo. In December 1931 former members of the now defunct PNI created PNI Baru as a more radical alternative to Partindo. The new political parties competed vigorously against each other and one of the battlegrounds was the organisation of urban workers.

In January 1932, Partindo created a separate department for labour unions alongside existing departments for politics, cooperatives and education. A clear signal of the importance of this new department was that the party chairman, Sartono, took direct control. Even though Partindo was creating its own labour unions, Sartono continued to argue that labour unions should not be involved in political activities. He believed that this would enable workers who were sympathetic to political parties other than Partindo to join a Partindo created union because it was focussed solely on industrial issues and improving members' welfare. Moreover, he was conscious of the fate of unions created by the PKI because they had mixed politics with labour activities. Sartono's views were little different from those of Sutomo, though Sutomo placed greater emphasis on the social welfare and mutual benefit functions of unions. However, the political climate where Partindo was competing against both the PNI Baru and the PBI made a continuation of earlier cooperation much more difficult. Surabaya Partindo leaders who had hesitated to create their own unions because of the existence of the PSSI, which they had been instrumental in creating, were told by the Partindo central executive to emulate the

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[140] *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 15 and 30 May, 15 June and 31 October 1931. *Moestika*, 6 May 1931.

Batavia and Semarang branches that had already started to move in this direction.[141]

Partindo created a series of labour unions in 1932 in the major cities of Bandung, Batavia, Semarang, Madiun and Surabaya. In Surabaya they competed for workers in the same industries as the PSSI, including taxi drivers, shop assistants, printers, domestic workers and workers in the engineering companies. The creation of a Perserikatan Kaum Buruh Indonesia at Surabaya in March 1932 was a direct challenge to the PSSI, as its stated aim was to be a nationalist federation of labour unions in the city. Similar federations were established in Semarang, Yogyakarta and Mataram. In December 1932, Partindo created a 'Radicale Vakcentrale Indonesia', to coordinate union activities through meetings and courses and a fighting fund.[142] The name positioned it as heir to the radical labour tradition, in contrast to what Partindo regarded as the conservatism of the PBI-controlled PSSI.

While Partindo's strategy was to create new unions in direct competition with those created by the PBI and the PSI, PNI Baru activists in Surabaya adopted the strategy of taking control of existing unions from the inside. The targets were the PBI-controlled unions. By late 1931 a majority of the Sarekat Sekerja Indonesia executive were members of PNI Baru and in January they withdrew the union from the PBI-controlled labour union federation. The stated reason was that they disagreed with the federation's insistence on the separation of politics and labour union activity and its involvement with the transmigration group. As a result, Ruslan Wongsokusumo severed all ties with the Sarekat Sekerja Indonesia, stating that while he was both a political person and a labour union person, he knew the line between the two. In his view, the new SSI leaders were intent on blurring the line to the ultimate detriment of labour unions.[143] Ruslan was expressing the discomfort within the PBI at the growing PNI Baru influence within the labour unions they had created. In urging branches to redouble their social and economic activities and their efforts to protect workers' living conditions the PBI central executive insisted that they not to mix unions and politics "… because history has shown that a labour movement which gets involved in politics eventually becomes smashed into pieces."[144]

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[141] PPO, January 1932, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934.

[142] *Persatoean Indonesia*, 22–29 June and 10 December 1932; PPO, December 1932, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934.

[143] *Soeara Oemoem*, 28 January 1932.

[144] *Soeara Oemoem*, 2 January 1932.

The PSSI had hoped to become the national federation of labour unions for private sector workers, much as the PVPN represented the major Indonesian unions for public sector workers. But it failed to expand much beyond Surabaya and, with Partindo organising urban workers and PNI Baru activists working within existing unions, it was becoming clear that it was unlikely to realise its goal. Late in 1932, it made one final attempt to create a Java-wide federation by announcing that it would organise an Indonesian Workers Congress in May the following year. Between the decision to call the Congress and May 1933 when the Congress was held, the unions within the PSSI became dominated by people from PNI Baru whose views on the connection between unions and politics were very different from those of the PBI.

The Wild Schools Ordinance

In the 1920s and the 1930s there was an enormous growth in private schools, especially in Java and in the Minangkabau area of West Sumatra. The demand for a western-style education far outstripped its provision by the state. These 'wild schools', as they became known, included those created by the Taman Siswa Institute, which taught western subjects within a Javanese cultural framework, those created by the modernist Islamic organisation, Muhammadiyah, and those created by the Indies Theosophical Society. These three groups educated a large number of boys and girls who were later to make significant contributions to the social, economic and political life of Indonesia after independence. The 'wild schools' also included hundreds of small, independent and often poorly resourced schools established by labour unions, socio-economic groups, religious organisations and political parties as well as individuals.

The colonial government had imposed restrictions on these private schools since 1923 in an attempt to keep them under close supervision. Faced with the rapid expansion of private schools during the Depression years—a direct result of significant reductions in funding for government schools[145]—in September 1932 the government introduced the so-called

[145] In 1934 the education budget was reduced to 74.1 per cent of that in 1928, falling even further to a low of 45.5 per cent in 1937. It recovered slightly to 58.7 per cent in 1939. See, Alfian, *Muhammadiyah. The Political Behavior of a Muslim Modernist Organisation Under Dutch Colonialism* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Madah University Press, 1989), p. 301. Alfian has an extensive discussion of education and the Wild Schools Ordinance in chapter 5.

Wild Schools Ordinance which significantly extended these controls. Its main clause stipulated that all private schools had to have permission to operate from the local government. In order to receive permission, their teachers had to have a certificate from a government or subsidised school and, in the opinion of the local government, a school must not be a threat to 'tranquillity and order'. The new Ordinance was a direct threat to unsubsidised schools. The criteria for registration of individual schools were so imprecise that they would be subject to the whims of local officials. Moreover, most were largely staffed by teachers who were themselves graduates from unsubsidised schools and therefore ineligible for certification. At a time when the government had virtually ceased recruitment to the civil service, teaching in a private school was one of the few options available to many western-educated Indonesians. Now, even if they could stay open, the schools' diplomas were in danger of not being recognised by the government and their graduates made ineligible for government employment.

On 1 October, Ki Hadjar Dewantoro, the founder and director of the Taman Siswa Institute, announced his total opposition to the ordinance in a telegram to Governor-General De Jonge, stating that he would organise passive resistance to its implementation. Receiving no reply, on 3 October he issued a manifesto urging passive resistance by all private schools. The government was given until 31 March 1933 to withdraw the regulations or face massive civil disobedience. Ki Hadjar's use of the language of "passive resistance" and "civil disobedience" reflected the deep influence of India, particularly Tagore and Gandhi, and the unitarian spirituality of the Theosophical Society.[146]

Ki Hadjar's defiant stance struck a responsive chord. Hundreds of thousands of children were pupils at the private, unsubsidised, schools. Thousands of western-educated Indonesians taught in them. Their rapid growth was a very public rebuke to the cutback in public education. They were also a powerful symbol of anti-colonialism, of a growing determination to create a stronger civil society free of the control of the colonial state and of what many political and union leaders called the creation of a "state within a state."

Between October 1932 and February 1933 hundreds of protest meetings were organised throughout Java and Sumatra, not only by Taman Siswa but

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[146] The most extensive discussion of Taman Siswa, and its opposition to the Wild Schools Ordinance, is Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership. The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

by almost every Indonesian organisation, including many hitherto regarded as 'loyal' by the government. The PPPKI, Muhammadiyah and Budi Utomo held a large meeting of over 10,000 in Yogyakarta and called on the government not to apply the Ordinance to the Principalities. In Bandung, Partindo and PNI Baru led the action committee. After Ki Hadjar had addressed its conference in November, the PPPKI also pledged its full support and organised large public protest meetings throughout the country on 11 and 18 December.

Indonesian unions strongly supported Ki Hadjar's campaign, with trenchant criticism of the government for trying to restrict Indonesians from providing education to their children themselves while at the same time reducing public expenditure on schools. They saw this as further evidence of a colonial government uninterested in the advancement of Indonesians and doing whatever it could to prevent the development of a strong civil society. The government was accused of spending a mere 52.5 cents per head each year on the education of Indonesians but spending 18 guilders and 22 cents a head on the education of Europeans.[147] "A land with an ignorant people is doomed to be at the bottom," stated the federation of teacher unions. The government had to be forced to realise the importance of education so that the Indonesian people no longer lived in darkness.[148]

The NIOG, the European teachers' union, also supported the campaign with union representatives attending the large protest meetings. PGHB and NIOG support was tempered, however, by concerns about the long-term implications for publicly funded education of the rapid growth of unsubsidised private schools. They questioned the quality of some of these schools, arguing that the private sector was no substitute for an expansion of the public school system. They were particularly concerned that private schools paid their teachers lower wages than public schools. This was a potential threat to public school teachers at a time when the government was cutting the education budget.[149] The PGHB was also wary of the Taman Siswa movement because it did not permit teachers in its schools to join a union.[150]

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147 *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 6 February 1933.

148 *Persatoean Goeroe*, 25 July 1932, in *IPO*, 1932/32, p. 97.

149 "De Wilde Scholen", *De School*, 8 November 1935. The article concluded by stating that "The salaries at these schools are already being used as a weapon against the labour movement."

150 See a letter from Taman Siswa confirming this policy in *Persatoean Goeroe*, September 1937, p. 76.

The extent of the protests, and the extensive cooperation between political and non-political organisations, alarmed the government. It feared that the radical political parties, PNI Baru and Partindo, along with the PSI would achieve irreversible influence among the more moderate and less political organisations. In December the Attorney-General took a step toward quashing public protest by forbidding processions or open air meetings by Indonesian organisations to protest against the Ordinance. At the same time, Governor-General De Jonge began a process of accommodation, which eventually led to a compromise with the nationalists. He authorised Kiewiet de Jonge, the government adviser for general matters in the Volksraad, and Gobee, the adviser for native affairs, to hold discussions with Ki Hadjar and Indonesian political and union leaders.

The Influence of India

Many of the Indonesians who had studied in the Netherlands in the 1920s had made contact with young Indian nationalists in Paris, Berlin or Moscow. They discussed colonialism and imperialism and how to rid their homelands of the colonial powers. India also influenced the new Indonesian elite through the Indies Theosophical Society, which flourished from the 1910s and reached a peak in the early 1930s. Branches were established in the major cities and towns in Java, libraries were created, schools were built and public education courses developed. The literature of the Indies Theosophical Society was widely read by both Indonesians and Europeans. Thousands of young Indonesians were educated in Theosophical Society schools, many of whom went on to prominence in the Indonesian nationalist movement and in public and private life after independence. While few would have regarded themselves as Theosophists, many were deeply influenced by theosophical ideas.[151]

From the late 1920s Indonesian labour and political leaders took a growing interest in the Indian National Congress and the Indian labour movement. They were impressed by what seemed to be powerful and effective organisations. In the 1930s, newspapers, political party journals and labour union magazines closely followed the political and labour movements in India, often contrasting what they saw as the relatively liberal legal structures of British India with the highly restrictive legal structures of the Neth-

[151] See, Iskandar P. Nugroho, "The Theosophical education movement in colonial Indonesia (1900–1947)", MA Hons thesis, University of New South Wales, 1995.

erlands Indies. Biographical sketches of Rabindranath Tagore, Nehru and Gandhi were published, along with reports on strikes, the non-cooperation movement, the civil disobedience campaigns and the moves towards self-government.[152] *Soeara Oemoem* published a regular "Voice from India" column from 1933. In November 1932, Sukarno's *Soeloeh Indonesia Moeda* published a lengthy article on passive resistance in India and the Gandhian civil disobedience campaign against the salt tax, including the Indian National Congress manifesto on the development of passive resistance.[153] The language of Indonesian politics in the 1930s incorporated words from the Indian nationalist movement, such as "passive resistance" and "swadeshi". This attention to events in India by Indonesian labour union and political leaders did not go unnoticed by Dutch colonial officials. They had long considered the British Indian government's response to the Indian nationalist movement as dangerously weak and could not understand its tolerance of the Gandhian civil disobedience campaigns. They were determined that there would be no such disobedience in the Indies.

The movement against the Wild Schools Ordinance had adopted the language of passive resistance, but it was the swadeshi movement, symbolised by Gandhi and his spinning wheel, that captured the attention of many politically conscious Indonesians in the 1930s. At a time of high urban unemployment and rural distress, the swadeshi movement promised a way to create local jobs, strengthen local industries and reduce dependence on foreign capital. Indonesian labour unions had long sought to attract members by creating social security funds. The swadeshi movement in India strengthened their belief in the importance of creating a strong civil society and Indonesian control of the economy.

The swadeshi movement in India was a source of inspiration for the development of the Pasar Malam Nasional (National Night Market) in Surabaya. Organised by the Indonesian Study Club/PBI and first held in 1930, it became an annual event in the 1930s. The Study Club saw it as a way

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[152] See, for example, "Gerakan Hindia-Inggris. Bagaimana Gandhi?", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 7 October 1933, "Dr Annie Besant dengan Sosialisme", *Soeara Oemoem*, 9 and 15 December 1933, "Soerat-soerat dari India", *Soeara Oemoem*, 23 December 1933, 4, 6, 8 and 13 January 1934, "Servants of India Society", *Soeloeh Indonesia*, October 1926, and "De non-cooperatie idee een uiting van en Tijdgeest", *Soeloeh Indonesia*, July 1926. There is also a long article on the Gandhian civil disobedience movement and on Gandhi being freed from jail in *Soeara Oemoem*, 10 May 1933. The first life of Gandhi to be written by an Indonesian, and published in Indonesia, appeared in April 1933. See, *Soeara Oemoem*, 22 April 1933.

[153] Adviser for Native Affairs to Governor-General, 29 December 1932, Secret Mail Report 1933/39, NA.

of showcasing local products and services, local cultural groups and civic organisations. The 1932 Pasar Malam Nasional was typical. Despite the Depression, 96,619 people attended over 16 nights, paying more than 17,000 guilders for tickets. Each night there were cultural performances on the main stage: wayang, ketoprak and gamelan, as well as musical groups and children's choirs. An open-air cinema was popular as were numerous food and drink stalls. Over 20 stands sold handicrafts, batik sarongs and other Indonesian-made products. The charities managed by the wives of prominent PBI members had stands, selling bric-a-brac at good prices. There was also a stand from a well-known Surabaya goldsmith. He did a brisk trade in specially designed brooches, in honour of the PNI, and rings and safety pins, in honour of the PBI. One of the largest stalls was operated by the Dieng cigarette company, which produced the Sempurna brand. Owned by a prominent Surabaya Chinese family and employing some 1,000 people, the Dieng company was a strong supporter of the night markets. Its stall at the 1933 Pasar Malam sold 1,333 guilders worth of cigarettes with all the proceeds donated to unemployed Chinese support groups in Surabaya.[154]

Each year new stalls enlarged the night markets. The 1933 Pasar Malam Nasional had a photographic stall, which sold framed photos of national heroes, such as Sukarno, Sutomo, Hatta, Tjipto Mangunkusumo and Ki Hadjar Dewantoro. It also had a stall from the *Soeara Oemoem*, which sold copies of its daily newspaper and a brochure on the labour movement. The largest nurses' union in the colony, the PKVI, had a stall, with nurses and midwives promoting good health and hygiene. Adjacent to the stall it operated a polyclinic where for a small charge people could get medical advice.[155] The National Night Market was a celebration of Indonesian nationalism and the growth of a modern, progressive civil society in Surabaya. Annual profits were used to support charities operated by the Study Club and the upkeep of the Indonesian National Building. Its success in Surabaya stimulated political and labour groups in towns and cities throughout Java to follow suit. Smaller versions of the annual Surabaya event became commonplace, with profits used to support local unemployed support groups and other charities.

Labour unions were strong advocates of swadeshi. In the 1930s they opened shops, clinics, pharmacies, small industries producing items such

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[154] There are detailed reports on the 1932 Pasar Malam Nasional in *Soeara Oemoem*, 1–11 July 1932.

[155] See reports on the 1933 Pasar Malam Nasional in *Soeara Oemoem*, 1–18 July 1933.

as soap and furniture, and even motor vehicle repair shops and barber shops. Members were urged to support Indonesian-owned services and Indonesian-made products. An advertisement for the "Toko Budi Oetomo" (Budi Utomo shop) in Bandung, owned by the conservative nationalist party Budi Utomo, was typical of the style of advertisements in Indonesian newspapers:

> Buy now, with the intention of supporting Indonesian industry. Support the Budi Utomo shop, which is a trading organisation based on the slogan: Get an umbrella before it rains.[156]

The Bumiputera 1912 Insurance Company, established by the PGHB, was a large company by the 1930s and it too also stressed the importance of Indonesians supporting an indigenous company rather than the large foreign-owned insurance companies. Its advertising told Indonesians that:

> In these difficult times, a person must not only participate in politics but also in the development of the economy, which is very important for the future of our Indonesian nation and motherland.[157]

Sartono, Suroso and Sutomo were prominent advocates for swadeshi. Sartono was responsible for the organisation of the inaugural Partindo Congress held in Batavia in May 1932. One of the Commissions established by the Congress was charged with promoting the swadeshi movement. Sartono was its chairman.[158] A swadeshi show was organised as part of the Congress, with a large proportion of the audience wearing traditional batik clothing. At the Indonesian Raya Congress (Greater Indonesia Congress) in Surabaya in December 1931 Suroso expressed his regret that up to 60 per cent of the clothing sold in Indonesian was imported, arguing that if Indonesians purchased batik and other locally made clothing instead then many unemployed people would get work.

Under Sutomo's leadership the Indonesian Study Club had continually argued that western-educated Indonesians had a responsibility to build a strong civil society. The Study Club, and the PBI that emerged from it, as well as the labour unions they created, all emphasised socio-economic activities. The establishment of the national night market was a very public manifestation but by the early 1930s, the PBI had also created an Indonesian National Bank, charities to support the poor, the widowed, the

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156 *Kareta Api*, September 1933.

157 *Soeara Oemoem*, 11 January 1932.

158 See, Secret Report on Partai Indonesia, 4 July 1932, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 8 July 1932, Secret Mail Report 1932/721, NA.

orphaned, the sick and the unemployed, a large number of cooperatives in the Surabaya kampung and its own schools. All this was in addition to organising Surabaya workers into labour unions.

In June 1932 Sutomo wrote an article in which he argued that while the Depression had badly affected the country, it also provided opportunities for Indonesians to develop enterprises free from government control or foreign capital. In October 1933, as the Depression deepened, he returned to the theme:

> The space for activity, especially national activity, increases day by day, provided only that our nation is aware of it, prepared for it and ready to take advantage of it. For us, there has never been a better time than the present, the Depression period, to spread our wings
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> Our skilled tradesmen and our handicraft industries have a good opportunity at this time, which they should use to improve and expand their activities.

He gave two examples of opportunities created by the Depression. First, was the collapse of the sugar industry. In his view this might turn out to be a good thing if the land released from growing sugar cane was used for growing crops for local consumption and for export. Second, was the decline in government spending on education. This provided an opportunity to expand the influence of national schools. He summed up his argument by stating:

> In short, for those who are able to see beyond the end of their finger, the bad situation now, the Depression, is a kind of fertiliser, a kind of manure, a kind of rich soil, which can be used to revive and grow our national life.[159]

Indonesian labour union and political leaders saw the swadeshi symbolism as a way to promote the self-help ideas they had long advocated. They admired Gandhi but were not arguing for a return to an imagined idyllic village world dominated by cottage industries and did not accept Gandhi's rejection of modern technology. Swadeshi for them was not a spiritual journey, but a means of building a civil society and an economy in which ownership was in the hands of Indonesians. While people were encouraged to wear batik at public functions, it was more a symbolic assertion of cultural pride and independence from foreign produced goods than an expression of the moral virtue of handicrafts and a simple village way of life. They supported the development of Indonesian capitalism, but at the same time

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159 "Lagi: Malaise kawan kita", *Soeara Oemoem*, 17 October 1933.

recognised that in an independent Indonesia the state would have a major role in the development of a modern industrial society.

Not all labour union and political leaders were enthused by the swadeshi movement. Sukarno, for example, insisted that labour union and political leaders must not forget their core functions of opposing capitalism and imperialism and forcing employers to improve workers' wages and conditions. He appreciated the symbolic importance of swadeshi but cautioned against believing that it was a means to economic salvation for Indonesia.[160] His caution was shared by Hatta, Sjahrir and Sukiman, who argued that the Gandhian focus on handicrafts and the village economy was not a way forward for Indonesia in an era of industrial production.[161] Their deeper concern was Gandhi's opposition to class struggle. If swadeshi simply meant the replacement of foreign capitalism with Indonesian capitalism then, in their view, the Indonesian people would be no better off. In a pointed critique of the "bourgeois" ideas of Partindo, Sjahrir noted that the right-wing Dutch colonists' organisation, the Vaderlandsche Club, also supported swadeshi. What, he asked, was the connection between the Vaderlandsche Club and the Partindo swadeshi people? His answer was "Nothing less than the mental affinity of the bourgeoisie, the spiritual unity of the bourgeoisie, based on an issue related to overseas competition."[162]

Oetoesan Indonesia was critical of swadeshi advocates' stress on buying local batik and purchasing goods from locally owned cooperatives. In its view they were ignoring the fact that people preferred cotton imports from

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[160] "Swadeshi dan Massa-Actie di Indonesia", *Soeloeh Indonesia Moeda*, May 1932, pp. 6–26 and June 1932, pp. 43–55. See also, the rejection of swadeshi as applicable to Indonesia by the PNI lawyer Sunario in , "Swadeshi", *Persatoean Indonesia*, 10–20–30 May 1933, pp. 16–25.

[161] See, for example, "Pergerakan Swadeshi. Hilang sama sekali", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 19 January 1934 and an interview with Hatta in the Netherlands in August 1933, in *Moestik*a, 17 August 1932.

[162] "Vaderlandsche Club – Swadeshi – Soekarno", *Daulat Ra'jat*, 10 July 1933. Sjahrir was dismissive of the advice on swadeshi prepared for the 1933 Partindo Congress by Sunario. Sunario stated that swadeshi stood for the creative power of the people themselves and that swadeshi was used by independent countries to protect young industries against competition from larger and more powerful states. Sjahrir dismissed the link between swadeshi and protectionism, arguing that this was bourgeois economics. He was also critical of Sukarno's warning that the importation of cheap goods from Japan was Japanese imperialism. In the eyes of the consumer, he asserted, the only important concern was that Japanese goods were cheap. The swadeshi slogan of supporting the creative power of the Indonesian people was, in his view, only supporting the creative power of Indonesian capitalists. He was critical of the bourgeois mentality of part of the nationalist movement which condemned foreign capitalism but praised Indonesian capitalism.

Japan to handmade batik because they were cheaper and considered more modern. In an age of increasingly large-scale industrial production, local industries could not compete successfully with imported goods unless there was tariff protection. Moreover, it argued, enthusiasm for local cooperatives ignored the fact that most people preferred to shop at Chinese-owned stores even if the prices were higher. The problem here, it believed, was that Chinese-owned shops preferred to buy products and services from fellow Chinese rather than support Indonesian tradesmen or suppliers. This was the issue that needed to be addressed. If swadeshi meant buying batik and shopping at cooperatives, it offered no real benefits to ordinary Indonesian workers.[163]

Cooperating Across the Race Divide

The PVPN was established on the cusp of the Depression. It is therefore not surprising that it struggled to achieve its goal of becoming a significant force in the Indonesian labour movement. Constituent unions were faced with their own problems of reductions in membership and finances and were in no position to provide substantial support. The PVPN had little money or physical resources and only a weak organisational structure. Its 1931 budget was a mere 600 guilders.[164] It was almost entirely dependent on the energies of Suroso and Surjopranoto. Surjopranoto was its major organiser and the editor of its magazine, *Persatoean Sekerdja*, but due to a lack of money this appeared only in 1931. Suroso was its most important public voice. Throughout the 1930s he was a persistent advocate for Indonesian workers, arguing for such things as a minimum wage, regulated hours of work and rest days, improved safety laws, an unemployment insurance scheme and the legal right of workers to organise. His position as a member of the Volksraad gave the PVPN access to officials it would otherwise have found difficult to contact. Importantly, Suroso could not be dismissed as yet another labour union troublemaker. The colonial government, and indeed the Dutch-language colonial press, were compelled to take notice of him.

The PVPN responded to the latest Salaries Commission report by sending a telegram to Queen Wilhelmina asking her to protect Indonesian government workers from policies it claimed would hit lower level workers

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163 "Pergerakan Swadeshi. Hilang sama sekali", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 19 Janaury 1934.
164 *Persatoean Sekerdja*, 15 November and December 1931.

the hardest. The Governor-General rejected the argument, but acknowledged that a few groups of lower level workers would be moved from tier B to tier A, arguing that "… this is a normal consequence of Native workers increasingly filling the lower ranks …"[165] This simply confirmed the conviction of Indonesian labour union leaders that Indianisation meant the promotion of Indonesians to jobs previously the preserve of Eurasians or expatriate Europeans, but with 'native' wages. Surjopronoto was moving onto dangerous ground, however, when he informed readers of the PVPN magazine, *Persatoean Sekerdja*, that the economy measures of 1922–1924 had also been introduced with no regard for Indonesians and that the communist rebellions flowed from this.[166]

Member unions formed branches of the PVPN in the major cities of Surabaya, Semarang, Yogyakarta, Batavia and Bandung, but they too were constrained by lack of funds. Nevertheless, they were important for the organisation of public meetings to protest against the government's economy measures. A Fonds Korban Penghematan PVPN (PVPN fund for victims of the economising) was established in 1932 to support redundant members of affiliated unions and the PVPN took part in the burgeoning national night market and other fund raising activities for the unemployed.[167] In May 1932, the Surabaya branch opened a Kantoor dan Perusahan Locaal PVPN (local PVPN office and business), with a laundry, a tailoring shop and a shoe shop providing jobs for the unemployed.[168] Suroso was vocal in his criticism of the colonial government's 1932 budget that significantly reduced expenditure on Indonesian schools, throwing his support behind the strong protest of the Indonesian and European teacher unions.

The Depression and the government's economy measures brought Indonesian and European labour unions close together. They had common enemies. In addition to the government, oil and plantation interests were in their sights. This convergence of views can be seen in demands for higher oil royalties and higher taxes on better paid workers, as well as in critiques of the "drainage" of the Indies economy because foreign capital took profits out of the country instead of reinvesting in it. Both Indonesian and European labour unions recognised the lack of indigenous capital and

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165 *Persatoean Sekerdja*, 15 April 1931.
166 *Persatoean Sekerdja*, 15 April 1931.
167 *Doenia Pegadaian*, 5 March 1932 and *Soeara Oemoem*, 22 March 1932.
168 *Het Postblad*, June 1932, pp. 101–2 and *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 4 June 1933.

advocated an industrialisation policy driven by state capitalism as the only way to free the economy from foreign control. They worked together to coordinate public campaigns in the major cities and to seek support from the Netherlands labour movement.

Increased cooperation between labour unions across the race divide worried the colonial government and employer groups, and outraged sections of the Dutch-language colonial press. An added concern was the growing contact between Indonesian labour unions and international labour bodies, especially the Netherlands Federation of Labour Unions, the NVV.[169] Netherlands social-democrats had renewed their interest in the Indies and had decided to support the colonial labour movement, both materially and through increased advocacy in the Netherlands Parliament and press. In June and July 1931 a delegation from the NVV visited the Indies to investigate labour conditions first-hand. It went to the Deli plantations on the east coast of Sumatra before moving to the major industrial cities of Java and holding discussions with Indonesian and European labour union leaders.[170]

The NVV visit was fiercely attacked by much of the Dutch-language colonial press.[171] The attacks became vituperative after the delegates attended the formal opening of the Volksraad but remained seated while the Netherlands National Anthem was played. They were accused of being nothing but a bunch of socialists intent on undermining the authority of the colonial government and the position of Europeans in the colony at a time of social and economic stress. Its leader, Piet Moltmaker, retorted that the press was short-sighted because it failed to understand that the NVV

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[169] In December 1931 the Netherlands Railway and Tramway Workers' Union, NVSTP, invited the chairmen of the PBST and the Spoorbond to attend its Congress in Utrecht in May 1932, and after that to attend the Prague conference of the International Transport Workers Federation. It offered to contribute 3,000 guilders to their costs. The PBST did not attend, presumably because it could not afford the additional cost. It is not known if the Spoorbond attended. See, Attorney-General to Governor-General, 22 January 1932, Secret Mail Report 1932/97, NA.

[170] The Indies Employers Association (Beniso) debated whether or not employers should allow the NVV delegation to inspect their operations. It argued that employers should be under no illusion that the delegation would be objective but that if they banned it from entering their premises they would be accused of having something to hide. Beniso circular, B1920, enclosed in NHM Archives, no. 6775, NA.

[171] An article in the *Indische Courant* argued "… that the European labour movement, when there are those whose aims are unacceptable and who are moving along a path which threatens peace, in a terrible way has reneged on its duty towards the thousands of Dutch employees who only want to see their interests promoted in a way which shows complete loyalty to Netherlands authority." Reprinted in *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 October 1930.

wanted to direct the attention of the colonial labour movement to Amsterdam rather than to Moscow.[172]

Public meetings in Surabaya (organised by the PBI), in Yogyakarta (organised by the pawnshop workers' union), and in Batavia and Bandung (organised by the PVPN and the federation of teacher unions), drew large crowds to hear about the history and achievements of the labour movement in Europe.[173] The meetings featured a film specially produced by the NVV. Titled "Triomf" (translated as "Menang-Moelia"—glorious victory), it showed the dramatic improvement in Dutch workers' wages and conditions after they were unionised. It also contained excerpts from the 1929 NVV Congress, including part of a speech by Haji Agus Salim, and showed workers' representatives in the Netherlands Parliament and on parliamentary committees. The film was donated to Indonesian unions and was screened many times after the delegation left the colony. An accompanying program produced by the Batavia branch of the PVPN and the PGHB explained to Indonesian audiences its significance, the importance of the NVV for Dutch workers and the international nature of workers' struggles for justice. [174]

Before returning to the Netherlands, the NVV Delegation met with PVPN and PSSI leaders and urged the two federations to unite in order to strengthen the labour movement. It indicated that the NVV would contribute financially to a single Indonesian labour union federation.[175] The PVPN Congress in October 1931 agreed in principle to amalgamation, in keeping with the long-held views of Suroso and Surjopranoto that the division between public and private sector unions weakened the labour movement. A commission was established in 1932 to try to find a way forward.[176] In the end it failed, caught between PVPN concern about PSSI involvement with political parties and PSSI concern that the PVPN was a slave of the government.[177] While Suroso and Sutomo got on well with each other, there was

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[172] Piet Moltmaker was a member of the Upper House of the Netherlands Parliament, an executive member of the NVV and chairman of the Netherlands Railway and Tramway Workers Union.

[173] See reports in *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 and 16 July and 1 August 1931.

[174] Dahler, P.H., *Pergerakan Kaoem Sekerdja. Ichtiar tjara dan hasil pekerdjaan dan tenaga N.V.V. Nederland akan tjermin bagi pergerakan sekerdja di Indonesia* (Batavia: 1931), and *Soeara Boeroeh Indonesia*, 31 July 1931.

[175] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 October 1931.

[176] *Kareta Api*, February-March 1932.

[177] Ruslan Wongsokusumo , who was involved in the discussions, stated that the talks had failed because the PSSI, and especially the SSI, had argued that the PVPN was a slave of the government. *Soeara Oemoem*, 28 Janaury 1932.

considerable distrust between other key Yogyakarta and Surabaya labour activists. Neither group was willing to make concessions.

The VVL led the joint action of Indonesian and European unions against wage reductions for government workers. An Action Committee was created under the leadership of its secretary, D.M.G. Koch, with protest meetings held in the major cities in Java. Surabaya, Bandung and Batavia saw large crowds of Indonesian and European public sector workers hear speakers from the major unions attack the government. The Batavia Action Committee brought together 52 labour unions, political parties and social organisations, both Indonesian and European. Its protest meeting on 10 July was organised by the Bataviaasche Bestuurders Bond, the European union for middle and high level municipal employees. An estimated 1,400 people attended with the chairman of the NVV Delegation one of the key speakers.[178] The NVV Action Committee in the Netherlands was recruited to the cause. In July 1931 it met with the Minister of Colonies to present the case against cuts to Indies government workers' wages, urging instead that the budget deficit be met by increasing taxes on higher income earners.[179]

Protest meetings in the Indies cities were stepped up to coincide with the Volksraad's consideration of an amendment to the 1932 budget proposed by the PVPN chairman Suroso, which rejected the reductions in wages and conditions for government workers.[180] The amendment was agreed to, 29 votes to 26, reflecting that many European members saw themselves as representing the interests of European public sector workers. The government rejected the amendment and, as required under the colony's constitution, referred the matter to the Netherlands Upper House. To the acute disappointment of labour union leaders in the colony the Suroso amendment was not supported by Netherlands social democrats.[181] After the Minister of Colonies assured the Netherlands Upper House that there was no question of unrest among Indies government workers because they were all loyal to the Crown, the Spoorbond simply responded by quot-

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[178] See reports in *De West-Java Courant*, 7 and 14 July 1931. In his speech Moltmaker stated that a salary of 400 guilders a month was not enough for a family, causing one person in the audience to call out loudly "I have much less!" Moltmaker was speaking to European/Eurasian workers when he concluded his speech by stating that they could depend on the NVV, "For we are flesh of the same flesh, and blood of the same blood!" The full speech was published in *De West-Java Courant*, 14 July 1931.

[179] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 April and 16 July 1931.

[180] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 March 1932.

[181] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 August 1931.

ing from the well-known expose of Dutch colonialism by Multatuli, published in 1860, "… every effort to protest is punished with hunger."[182]

The VVL and the PVPN continued to organise joint protest meetings. In September and October protest meetings were organised in Batavia, Bandung, Semarang, Surabaya and Madiun. The meetings again attracted large audiences of European and Indonesian public employees: 2,000 in Batavia and 800 in Bandung.[183] As unemployment among Europeans steadily increased, and as Europeans saw their children unable to get work or forced to accept work previously the preserve of Indonesians, European criticism of the government became even sharper. In late 1932 one writer to a European newspaper queried what the government or the Salaries Commission understood about life in the towns, arguing that, "One government teaches us to feed our children with western ideas, the following government forces us once again into the kampung."[184]

Despite cooperating to oppose the government's economy measures, relations between the PVPN and the VVL were strained by the PVPN's continued insistence that the three-tiered wage system should be reduced to two tiers. The VVL was critical of the PVPN for promoting race tension instead of class solidarity. Koch readily acknowledged that Indonesians' were suffering as a result of the Depression and that their wages were far too low. Nevertheless, he argued:

> In our opinion, the leaders of the Native labour movement have allowed their actions to be dictated too much by the conflict suggested by large capitalists, that is, good wages or good welfare. They must reject this proposition as inaccurate. It is not good wages or welfare policies, but good wages through welfare policies. They need to understand, that their first duty is to improve the living standards of the masses, especially those of the masses who have entrusted them with leadership. They need therefore to rethink, because it has never been a good tactic, in either a small or a large sense, to pull down those on 'higher' wages with the objective of improving their own position.[185]

The VVL increased the pressure in March 1931 with the publication of a weekly newspaper, *De West-Java Courant*. For over two years the newspaper was a fierce critic of the colonial government's management of the economy in general and its treatment of government workers in particular.

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182 *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 August 1931.
183 See reports in *De-West Java Courant*, 27 September and 4 October 1931.
184 *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 October 1932, quoting an article published in *De Volksstem.*
185 "Sluit de Gelederen", *De West-Java Courant*, 6 September 1932.

Edited by the social-democrats, Coster and Koch, it campaigned strenuously against the exploitation of the Indies by western companies, the drainage of the country's wealth to the benefit of shareholders in the Netherlands and the colonial government's failure over many decades to develop a self-sustaining local economy which would ensure prosperity for all of its people. When in late 1932 the Indies Employers Association called for a further 25 per cent reduction in wages, along with similar reductions in company taxes, State Railways tariffs and other government charges, because costs in the colony were too high, *De West-Java Courant* responded sharply:

> Employers aim to make the Indies a land of labourers, without the right, or at least the opportunity, to their own self development.
>
> The suggestion from the Employers Association, in plain terms, means a policy of exploitation by foreign capital of all employees in this land ....[186]

The growing confrontation between the government and European unions connected to the VVL is illustrated by its conflict with the European teachers' union the Nederlandsch-Indisch Onderwijzersgenootschap (NIOG). For two years the NIOG had been a strong critic of the government over its response to the Depression, its reductions in public sector wages and its cuts in the education budget. In June 1931 its journal reprinted a brochure titled 'Petroleum adel' (the oil noble), which was highly critical of the oil company BPM. The author, a man named Weber, was a chief editor at the government-owned newsagency Aneta but was sacked for writing the brochure, resulting in protests from the European labour unions. In reprinting it, the NIOG earned the wrath of the new Governor-General, with officials informing the union that they would no longer deal with it.[187]

In the latter half of 1931 the NIOG magazine published a series of articles fiercely critical of the government's 1932 Budget for reducing expenditure on education for Indonesians. Under instructions from the Governor-General, on 6 October the head of the Department of Education took the unprecedented step of formally warning the union that if it published any more articles along similar lines then members of its executive would be dismissed from their teaching jobs. The Governor-General, he stated, con-

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[186] *De West-Java Courant*, 23 December 1932.

[187] De West-Java Courant, 28 July 1931.

The government's Adviser for General Affairs in the Volksraad, Kiewiet de Jonge, informed the Volksraad that, "He was referring to an article on oil in *De School* which the new Governor-General considered offensive."

sidered that these articles had gone well beyond the acceptable limits of criticism.[188] The NIOG executive was unrepentant. It responded that both the NIOG and the PGHB were completely opposed to the proposed reductions in government funding of Indonesian education. *De School* urged all teachers, from the simplest village school to the Dutch language high school, to write to the head of the department of education expressing their opposition and stating that the NIOG and the PGHB would organise joint public protest meetings. NIOG members were called on to fight. The front-page editorial in *De School* on 27 November was headed 'Ten Strijd' (The Struggle), and informed readers that there was complete cooperation between the NIOG and the PGHB in the struggle against the destruction of education in the colony. [189] The PGHB Congress in January 1932 confirmed that it would work with the NIOG to fight the reductions and to fight salary reductions for government workers more generally.[190] The NIOG continued its critique of the government's education policy through 1932. In September it published a sarcastic article in *De School*, which asked why, when the oil and tobacco companies had made such huge profits over many decades, they could not reduce their dividends during the Depression in order to keep poorly paid workers employed. It concluded that the companies preferred profits over impoverished workers.[191]

In June 1932, Governor-General De Jonge opened a new sitting of the Volksraad with the usual pomp and ceremony. This time, though, there was a steely tone to his address. He informed members that he was determined to maintain 'tranquillity and order' and that in the current difficult economic conditions he would move more quickly and more forcefully against

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[188] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 November 1931. Governor-General De Jonge had arrived in the colony in September. In his memoirs he discussed his decision to issue a stern warning to the NIOG: "I came to the Indies convinced that it was not good there. One heard a great deal about the Native movement, independence, free from Holland etc. Despite this, I had the feeling that the danger did not reside in nationalism but in the mentality of the Europeans; that in so far as we can speak of a revolutionary movement, it came not from below but from above. My conviction was confirmed within a few months of my arrival and this case was the beginning [of my response]. I wanted to do something about the practice of insinuation and undermining of authority, especially coming from this quarter." Van der Wal (ed.), *Herinneringen van Jhr Mr. B.C. de Jonge* , p. 105.

[189] *De School*, 27 November 1931.

[190] PPO, January 1932 in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934. The PGHB and the NIOG had written a joint protest letter in November 1931. See, chairman and secretary PGHB and chairman and secretary NIOG to Director of Education and Public Worship, 24 November 1931, in Secret Mail Report 1932/299, NA.

[191] *De School*, 16 September 1932.

offenders than he might in more normal times.[192] It was a blunt warning, directed as much to European and Indonesian labour union leaders as it was to nationalist political leaders. The warning was followed in September by the introduction of a regulation permitting heads of departments and government industries to require employees to sign a declaration of loyalty under which they promised not to be involved in any organisation or activity that undermined the authority of the state. One more weapon to bring dissidents to heel.[193]

The Governor-General's veiled threat had no immediate effect. The labour press, both European and Indonesian, intensified its criticism and joint protest meetings continued to be organised in the major cities, attracting ever-larger crowds. On 3 October a large protest meeting was held in Batavia. Some members of the Volksraad attended, as did some KPM sailors in full uniform. The Federation of European Employees had joined with the VVL in organising the meeting and all speeches were translated into Indonesian for the large number of Indonesians in the audience. One of the speakers was Van Lonkhuyzen, the chairman of the federation of European employees and Volksraad member. His presence was notable because he had often been a critic of the VVL for what he regarded as ill-considered public criticism of the government. In comments that would have worried the government because they came from such a generally conservative man, he told the meeting that while he acknowledged the obstacles in the way he believed that it was possible for workers in the public and the private sectors to join in common protest. In his address the chairman of the Bataviaasche Bestuursbond, told his audience, to great applause, that "It is unfair that civil servants should freely be offered up to the altar of oil interests" and that "We must stand shoulder to shoulder, unity is power!!"[194]

In an attempt to defuse the criticism, in September 1932 the government established an Organised Labour Consultative Committee and immediately sought advice from it on the proposed second round of public sector wage cuts. The Committee had representatives from the major European and Indonesian labour federations, including the VVL, the PVPN and the PGHB. If the government thought that balancing representatives from con-

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[192] Van der Wal (ed.), *Herinneringen van Jhr Mr. B.C. de* Jonge, pp. 130–136.

[193] The regulation is published in J.H Petrus Blumberger, *De Communistische Beweging in Nederlandsch-Indie* (Haarlem: 1935), p. 188.

[194] The meeting is reported at length in *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 October 1932, p. 434–435.

servative European unions with more outspoken representatives from Eurasian and Indonesian unions would neutralise criticism, it was quickly disabused. In December the Committee, with only one dissenting voice, called on the government to desist from implementing a second round of wage cuts, arguing that many government workers would not be able to cope with less money. The advice was rejected. On January 1933 the wages of all government workers were cut by a further 7 per cent, making a total cut of 17 per cent in two years.[195]

At the end of 1932 Governor-General De Jonge was a worried man. A few months earlier he had been reported as having said that "… the worst is behind us", but by the end of the year he knew that this was far from the case.[196] The Depression was deepening in the Indies as it was throughout the world. He was faced with a nationalist press and Indonesian labour unions publicly critical of his policies and seemingly becoming more critical by the day. He was faced with a European labour movement working closely with the Indonesian labour movement and organising joint public protests. He was under attack from the Dutch-language press, the Vaderlandsche Club and employers. He faced a revolt in the education unions over proposed cuts to the education budget and a growing campaign by Indonesian organisations over the Wild Schools Ordinance. There was renewed organisation of Surabaya workers.

There was also unprecedented unrest in the military and the navy. In Bandung, Batavia, Yogyakarta and Surabaya, Indonesian and European military unions, representing both rank-and-file and under-officers, had been protesting for some months about cuts in wages and conditions and expressing anger about further cuts proposed for 1933 as the government sought to reduce state expenditure.[197] The unrest spilled over into the pub-

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195 See, *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 18 October 1932, and a detailed report on the advice of the Committee from Suroso in *Doenia Pegadaian* 25 December 1932.

196 The Governor-General's speech to the Surabaya Municipal Council in September was reported in *De West-Java Courant*, 20 September 1932. The editor responded by commenting that "… we are still not through the worst. The worst is yet to come …. At least for us!."

197 There were six unions for Europeans in the military and the navy, of which 'Ons Aller Belang' was the largest with 2,600 members at the beginning of 1931. There were also six unions for Indonesians. Two of the large ones were Oentoek Keperloean Kita for under-officers, which had a membership of 1,099 at the beginning of 1931, and the Inlandsche Marine Bond, which had a membership in late 1931 of 750 out of a total of 2,800 Indonesian sailors. Towards the end of 1932 the executive of Oentoek Keperloean Kita had written to the Army Commander, the Volksraad and the Salaries Commission protesting against the salary cuts and arguing that they should not apply to military personnel. *Bintang Timoer*,

lic sphere in Surabaya in late December when European and Indonesian sailors marched through the streets to a protest meeting. There they listened to speakers' attack the government over the wages and conditions in the navy and particularly over the further 10 per cent cut in wages from 1 January 1933. The sailors adopted a motion to go on strike if the cuts were implemented. A telegram was sent to the Ministry of Defence in The Hague demanding that wages for lower level naval personnel not be reduced further. The European press reacted with alarm, as did the naval command. Tjindarbumi, editor of the Surabaya newspaper *Soeara Oemoem*, moved onto dangerous ground when he praised the action of the Dutch and Indonesian sailors. This showed, he said, the power of solidarity across the races and was an example to the rest of the labour movement in the colony.[198]

The colony was far from rebellion—but that was not how it seemed to De Jonge. In his memoirs he reflected on the atmosphere in the colony at the end of 1932, stating that, "Resistance is growing from all sides."[199] The language of politics and labour unions—both Indonesian and European—had become much sharper, more critical and less respectful. To a deeply conservative man with a strong sense of the proper role of a Viceroy and a commitment to the Empire, at the end of 1932 the Indies seemed to be getting out of control.

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4 January 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/4, p. 51, *Sinar Laoetan*, October 1931. There were complaints about differential treatment of Indonesians and Europeans of the same rank. For example, a European under-officer with a wife and five children received a child allowance of 52 guilders whereas an Indonesian under-officer in the same situation received a child allowance of only 11 guilders and 50 cents. *Reveille*, December 1932, in *IPO*, 1933/1, p. 3.

The Inlandsche Marine Bond sent representatives to PVPN protest meetings in 1931 and also sent a telegram to the NVV delegation asking to meet with it in Surabaya. Both actions came under fire from the Dutch language press. See, *Sinar Laoetan*, August and October 1931.

198 *Soeara Oemoem*, 2 January 1933.

199 Van der Wal (ed.), *Herinneringen van Jhr Mr. B.C. de Jonge* , p. 156. De Jonge quoted the editor of the *Bataviaasche Handelsblad* on 19 December 1932 stating that "The government is making civil servants rebellious." Ibid., p. 157.

CHAPTER FIVE

STATE AND EMPLOYER REACTION

Governor-General De Jonge was alarmed that opposition to his economy measures was uniting labour unions across the race divide, emboldening Indonesian political and labour union leaders and posing a threat to his authority. The European press fanned these concerns. For over a year it had been urging him to take stronger measures against Indonesian political parties and labour unions and for the dangerous and disloyal leaders of European unions to be brought to account. Despite De Jonge's warning in the middle of 1932, public protests had intensified in the second half of the year. At the beginning of 1933 De Jonge determined to bring dissident elements in the colony to heel. Indonesians sensed that difficult days were ahead. In the words of one newspaper, "… darker clouds are building up over Indonesia."[1] While a reaction from the colonial state was not unexpected, labour union leaders were surprised by its intensity. They were forced once again to reconsider their strategies, not just to survive the Depression but also to survive an even more repressive state.

Arrests and Mutiny

The colonial government struck back at its critics in the first week of January 1933. The initial target was the leadership of the Batavian branch of *Ons Aller Belang*, the union for European army under-officers. The new army commander, General Koster, had accompanied the union executive to an audience with the Governor-General in December 1932. The union executive came away annoyed that neither the Governor-General nor the Army Commander had shown any warmth towards it. Subsequently, it sent a circular to members, which stated that "His Excellency failed to express any sympathy for the wishes of the under-officers." General Koster promptly had the executive arrested for insubordination.[2] He was making it clear that he intended to stamp out the dissent of the recent past.

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[1] *Warna Warta*, 9 January 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/2, p. 21.
[2] See a report in *De School*, 14 January 1933, p. 257.

The second target was PNI Baru. For some time government officials had been concerned about PNI Baru activities in towns and villages in Central Java and had watched with growing unease as the Surabaya and Semarang branches tried to gain a foothold in labour unions.[3] It was particularly sensitive about Surabaya because of the unrest among European and Indonesian sailors and fears that PNI Baru would take advantage of this. In early January, the Surabaya branch of PNI Baru spread a red handbill in the city kampung promoting a forthcoming public meeting. The handbill called for a revolution "… in the spirit of the Indonesian Marhaen" in order to achieve Independence. It was a handbill little different from many circulated previously, but it provided the government with an opportunity once more to demonstrate the limits of state tolerance. Ten members of the executive were arrested, with the leader of the branch course committee prosecuted for spreading "revolutionary propaganda".[4]

The NIOG, the union for European teachers, bore the brunt of the government's reaction in January. For three years the government had been irritated by its bitter criticism of cuts in the wages and conditions of teachers. The irritation deepened in 1932 when the NIOG joined forces with the Indonesian federation of teacher unions, the PGHB, in a public campaign against reductions to the education budget. When NIOG delegates met in Batavia on Christmas Eve 1932 for the union's annual Congress, they were clearly angry at what they saw as a devaluation of teachers and education. The Congress agenda was devoted to the government's economy measures and the sharp reductions in the education budget. A series of critical resolutions were adopted, with the union resolving to continue its public campaign both in the colony and in the Netherlands.

In the charged atmosphere of the Congress, speaker after speaker fiercely attacked the government. The tone was set early on the first day by the union secretary, J. Smits. He spoke of great unrest, an extraordinary sense of grievance and a spirit of rebelliousness among government workers, European as well as Indonesian. Delegates were called on to adopt the spirit of the French national anthem. "To arms citizens," urged Smits. He

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[3] See, Ingleson, *Road to Exile*, chapters 6 and 7.

[4] The handbill is enclosed in Secret Mail Report 1933/46, NA. See also, PPO, January-February 1933, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934. The handbill stated, in part, that "The spirit of the Indonesian Marhaen must be REVOLUTIONISED from SERVITUDE to FREEDOM." The arrests drew immediate protest from the PNI Baru's rival, Partindo, which spread a manifesto of support through the major cities in Java. Support also came from PBI leaders, Sutomo, Ruslan Wongsokusumo and Sudjono.

concluded with a warning. Although the labour movement did not want it to happen, the government needed to be aware that mounting discontent might ultimately lead to undesirable outcomes:

> We have heard words recently that we have never heard before. Recently there have been mumblings among civil servants about passive resistance and sabotage. This is a very serious sign[5]

Smits speech was provocative, but it was speeches by Gabe Vrijburg and Hyman Reens that were reported extensively in the Dutch-language press. Vrijburg was the head of the second class European Lower School at Magelang, East Java. Reens was a teacher at the Mulo School in Fort de Kock, on the west coast of Sumatra. Both had been born in the Netherlands but had made their teaching careers in the colony. Newspaper reports referred to Reens speaking of the possibility of government decisions being "sabotaged", and concluding that " … at the moment the government is our deadly enemy." He was also reported as stating that teachers must resist the dark shadow of the law descending on government workers:

> We have the freedom to defend our rights, the duty to make our grievances clear to the government. Still the application of force [by the government] must be expected. After the crisis, defence must be transformed into offence.[6]

To coincide with the NIOG Congress, on the evening of 25 December the European federation of public sector labour unions, now called the VVO, organised a public protest meeting in Batavia. Its chairman, Coster, spoke for two hours to a large crowd of Indonesian and European government workers. Perhaps stirred by the powerful speeches at the NIOG Congress, which he had attended, Coster's language was much stronger than at earlier VVO rallies. To continuous bouts of applause, he attacked the government and spoke of the growing anger among public sector workers:

> … much worse is the possibility that the government will be faced with the threat of passive resistance, sabotage etc, because the influence of the VVO is very limited and its executive can do no more than warn the government against playing with fire.[7]

The NIOG Congress and the VVO protest meeting were too much for the chief editor of the *Java Bode*, the prominent conservative journalist Zent-

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[5] The speech was printed in *De School*, 30 December 1932, pp. 226–229.

[6] Quoted in *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 5 January 1933. See also, *De School*, 17 February 1933.

[7] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 January 1933.

graaff. European 'leftists' had long been a target for his pen, along with Indonesians who did not understand their proper place in the colonial world. Personal attacks were his stock in trade. He described the decisions of the NIOG Congress as "… lawlessness of the worst kind," and called on the government to re-assert its authority:

> Never, in almost 40 years residence in the Indies, have we heard inciting language of such unlimited brutality, unworthy demagoguery and subtle threats, and so full of rumours, as burst forth at the NIOG meeting.
>
> The public expects, and demands, of the government, that this is brought to an end in the interest of the peaceful development of this land.[8]

Zentgraaff was not alone in his call for firm action. Over the following days the NIOG was described by Dutch-language newspapers as "red schoolteachers", "agitators", "dangerous characters who spread revolutionary principles to the young" and "a union of elements dangerous to the state."[9]

On 4 January 1933, Reens and Vrijburg were arrested and placed in preventive detention. In a move clearly intended to intimidate the leaders of European unions, they were accused of breaching the Criminal Code, which prohibited anti-authority speeches and writing. In taking this action the government relied entirely on reports in the Dutch-language press. Probably because it was Christmas Eve, no police had been present at the meeting and if a stenographic record had been made it could not be found.[10] The government was angered by the NIOG leaders and by the

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[8] The article was published in *Java Bode*, 31 December 1932 and quoted in *De West-Java Courant*, 11 January 1933. Zentgraaff argued, "We live here in a colony composed of a very heterogenous population. European troublemakers have brought and spread here much that is bad: we only have to remember names such as Baars, Sneevliet, Van Burink and others, who have found good pupils among Native groups for their destructive propaganda. Anybody who has lived and worked in this land, has a responsibility to take account of the mentality and outlook of other population groups; lawlessness in expressing your own views will lead here to the most undesirable consquences. Lawlessness of the worst kind was amply demonstrated in the recent NIOG meeting."

[9] See, *De School*, 13 January 1933, p. 267. Not all Dutch-language newspapers supported the extremist language used against the NIOG and the labour movement in general. *De Koerier*, the Catholic newspaper published in Bandung, attacked the editors of *Het Nieuws van den Dag* (Mulder) and *Java Bode* (Zentgraaff). On 1 March its editor (Kerstens) described them as, "Two jingoists, who through their outspoken anti-Native mentalities, provoke a continual sharpening of the relationship …. Both are old fashioned liberal reactionaries, who are a great deal more dangerous than Reens and Vrijberg." Quoted in *De School*, 10 March 1933, p. 384.

[10] There were accusations that the NIOG executive had destroyed the stenographic record of the Congress in order to protect Vrijburg and Reens. See, *Bataviaasche Handelsblad*, 7 January 1933. This was an issue investigated by the Court but never proven.

unrelenting criticism from unions affiliated to the VVO. It believed that its authority was being undermined and that the Indies-born Europeans and Eurasians represented by the VVO had lost sight of their responsibility to support the position of Europeans in the colony. It had enough difficulty managing the colony through the ravages of the Depression and containing Indonesian nationalists without also having to contend with disloyal Europeans.

Reens and Vrijburg received little sympathy from the European press. On the contrary, most of the press commended the Governor-General for his decisive action.[11] At a time of economic crisis the government needed Europeans to rally behind it, not to stir the population against it. If anti-authority sentiment was left unchecked, it would pose a grave threat to the colony: "… a strong hand must be applied to troublemakers."[12] When the NIOG urged members to boycott the *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, the *Nieuws van den Dag* and *Java Bode*, its three staunchest critics, the *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad* responded by calling on parents not to send their children to schools with NIOG members as teachers. It again urged the government to take strong action because "… if the Attorney-General does not take strong action against the NIOG, it will increasingly turn into a revolutionary organisation."[13]

Reens and Vrijburg were released from preventive detention at the end of January, but suspended from their jobs pending their trials. The government was probably surprised by the strength of the reaction to the arrests from both European and Indonesian labour unions. Hundreds of teachers joined the NIOG in January and its fighting fund quickly raised ten thousand guilders.[14] While European labour unions whose members were predominantly expatriates supported the government's move against the NIOG, those whose members were predominantly Eurasians were outraged that the press restrictions had been used against them. The VVO captured

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[11] See the article in *De Malanger*, which argued that "The children oppose the policy of their parents—the government—and decide to sabotage it. They are therefore an enemy. If one receives a blow, then there is only one answer: give a blow back." Quoted in *De Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 February 1933, p. 48.

[12] *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 6 January 1933. About the same time as the NIOG arrests, KPM, the monopoly intra-island shipping company, announced that it would no longer recognise the Vereeniging van Gezagvoerders en Stuurtlieden (union of captains and pilots) because it believed the union was stirring up workers against the company. See, *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 7 January 1933.

[13] Quoted in *De School*, 17 February 1933.

[14] *De School*, 27 January 1933.

this outrage when it stated that while in the past the 'hate sowing' articles had been applied differently to Europeans and Natives, this had now changed:

> The Native and the European labour movements are now more and more moving along the same path. This will inevitably have the consequence that for 'offences', such as press or speaking offences, the same rules will increasingly be applied to the different population groups.[15]

The European railway workers' union argued that with the arrests, …" the resentment, the bitterness and the resistance among the civil servants will only increase as a result."[16] The European postal workers' union was even more blunt:

> There is only one possible answer to this. More support! Indies employees, public and private, must line up behind their leaders in even greater numbers. Our action, which in the immediate future will be directed against the legal restrictions now inflicted upon us, must become more extensive and more powerful. ….
>
> Our struggle, carried out in the true interests of all employees, becomes heavier and more difficult each day.[17]

The arrest of NIOG leaders was another issue that united labour unions across the race divide. With some justification, the VVO described the government's action as "dumb", because it turned the NIOG leaders into martyrs and provided the best possible propaganda for the labour movement.[18] In a provocative article the VVO newspaper warned the government that while leaders of the labour movement were working hard to contain protests and resistance to its economy measures this could not be guaranteed:

> The sentiment [among civil servants] is so bad, the bitterness risen to such heights, that it threatens to breech the capacity of leaders to influence members. It is not we who are stirring up the civil servants—the government itself is making them rebellious, indeed more than rebellious.

It concluded by warning against what it called the "revolutionary right", represented by Zentgraaff:

> We warn the government explicitly against these dangerous 'advisers'. If it, and the uncritical part of the European public, fall in behind this right wing revolutionary publicist, then there could be an even more violent reaction

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15 "Wat Haat Zaait", *De West-Java Courant*, 11 January 1933.
16 *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 January 1933.
17 *'t Orgaan van de Postbond*, quoted in *De School*, 27 January 1933, p. 293.
18 *De West-Java Courant*, 11 January and 1 February 1933.

> from those who have become victims of such illegitimate behaviour, and this will probably have disastrous consequences.[19]

The depth of the criticism from European labour unions was unprecedented and was accompanied by large protest meetings in the major cities. A protest meeting organised in Batavia by the normally quiescent Bataviaasche Bestuursbond, a union for European civil servants in Batavia, and attended by representatives from both Indonesian and European unions, condemned the government and petitioned the Volksraad to withdraw the offending Articles from the Criminal Code.[20] Indonesian organisations supported the NIOG and welcomed the protests, although one newspaper could not resist pointing out that Indonesians had fought against the 'hate sowing' clauses for years, with little support from Europeans.[21]

One month after the arrests of the NIOG leaders the worst fears of the European community were realised. On 5 February sailors on the warship *De Zeven Provincien* mutinied while the ship was off the coast of Sumatra. Unrest among European and Indonesian sailors at the Surabaya naval base had finally come to a head. The new round of wage cuts had been postponed for one month for military personnel, which created an expectation that the protests of late 1932 had been successful. However, in late January the Ministry of Defence in The Hague, which was responsible for determining military salaries in the colony, announced that wage reductions would take effect from 1 February. Inexplicably, given the strength of feeling evident in the colonial army and navy, it announced that wages of Indonesians would be cut 17 per cent while those of Europeans would only be cut 14 per cent. The last week of January and the first few days of February saw public protest meetings in Surabaya and threats of strikes by European and Indonesian sailors. On 27 January, buses hired by their unions took 700

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[19] *De West-Java Courant*, 4 January 1933. This issue of the newspaper is missing, but the article is quoted in "De Muiterij bij de Marine", *De West-Java Courant*, 9 February 1933.

[20] *De School*, 27 January 1933, p. 282. With unfortunate timing, the Batavia branch of the ISDP held a protest meeting about the press restrictions in the Criminal Code and the government's arrest of the NIOG leaders on the day of the mutiny of the *De Zeven Provincien*. When a speaker referred to the mutiny, the leader of the Indies Fascist Association, de Bree, called out "That is your fault'." *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 6 February 1933.

[21] See, *Sipatahoenan*, 27 January 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/5, p. 67. *Bintang Timoer*, the outspoken Batavia newspaper edited by Parada Harahap, took a different view. It argued that the government had been courageous in arresting whites and that Indonesians had been arrested for much less provocative speeches. *Bintang Timoer*, 7 January 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/2, p. 20. Another Indonesian editor, while supporting the NIOG, asked if the voices of Indonesian and Chinese teachers could also be heard because they earned much less than the Europeans. *Warna Warta*, 9 January 1933, in IPO, 1933/2, p. 21.

European and Indonesian sailors to a protest meeting in the centre of Surabaya. During the journey the sailors sang the Dutch national anthem and a union song to the tune of the Internationale, as if to demonstrate their loyalty as well as their determination to obtain wage justice. After a noisy meeting, some 150 marched through the centre of Surabaya, in full uniform, until dispersed by naval and town police. The following day another large gathering of sailors was broken up by police.[22] The public protests were followed by direct action. Over the next few days nearly 500 Indonesian and over 60 European sailors were arrested after they refused to carry out their duties at the Surabaya base. The mutiny on *De Zeven Provincien* was the culmination of these protests.[23]

The mutiny was swiftly ended after a Dutch naval plane bombed the ship. The European community was shocked. Already nervous about potential unrest because of growing urban unemployment, the mutiny convinced large parts of the community that tough measures had to be taken against anti-authority sentiment in the colony. Conservative sections of the Dutch-language colonial press linked the mutiny to the growth of Indonesian and European naval unions over recent years, reminding readers that the activities and propaganda of the broader Indonesian labour movement were undermining the authority of the state. While the Indonesian-language press analysed the deeper reasons for the mutiny, pointing out that European officers as well as Indonesian sailors were involved, they were careful not to support the sailors' actions. Indonesian and European labour union leaders were quick to see the danger of labour unions becoming the scapegoat. They made it clear that the labour movement had not been recruiting in the navy or the army, that there were no links between the unions for armed forces personnel and civilian labour unions, and that all labour unions were strongly opposed to any form of violence.[24]

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[22] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 1 February 1933, *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 20 February 1933.

[23] The most comprehensive study of the mutiny is J.C.H. Blom, *De Zeven Provincien. Reacties en gevolgen in Nederland* (Bussem, 1975). See also, J.C.H. Blom, 'The Mutiny on Board De Zeven Provincien: Reactions and Repercussions in the Netherlands', *Acta Historiae Neerlandica*, Vol. 10 (1978), pp. 163–174. There are detailed reports in the Dutch language Indies press. See, for example, *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 24 February 1933. See also, the official publication, *De Ongeregeldheden bij de Koninklijke Marine in Nederlandsch-Indie in den Aanvang van 1933* ('s-Gravenhage: Algemeene Landsdrukkerij, 1934).

[24] See, for example, "Verklaring van den Spoorbond", *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 February 1933. "In the name of unionists in the Spoorbond, we want to make it clear that we seriously regret the mutiny of the marines …. We consider it very necessary to make this statement, in the context of some newspaper reports stating that the activities of civil service unions were directly or indirectly responsible for the events in the navy." The Attorney-General,

The mutiny revived European memories of the communist uprising of just seven years earlier. On 7 February, a loyalist march was organised to the Governor-General's palace in Batavia. De Jonge, warmed by the declaration of loyalty at a time when he felt under attack from all sides, gave an impromptu speech in which he drew a lesson from the incident:

> ... events such as this have one advantage. They open the eyes and awaken feelings of responsibility that lie in everyone who belongs to the nation that has achieved greatness under the slogan: I will stand firm.
>
> You will also stand firm and uphold, without distinction of race or rank, what has been created here in 300 years. Uphold the society that has been built here and in which you earn your living. In times of prosperity, but above all in times of adversity, you will stand firm.[25]

The mutiny fed the fears of the European community and provided more ammunition for conservative forces calling for tough action not only against disloyal natives but also against disloyal Europeans. At the end of February the Bishop of the Surabaya Apostolic Prefecture prohibited Catholics from membership of the NIOG, the VVO, the Socialist Marinebond and the Inlandsch Marine Bond on the grounds that they were all socialist organisations.[26] The editor of one Indonesian newspaper cautioned that 'loyalists' should not forget that they lived in a colony, which most people believed was an unfree state. He warned that the actions of the 'loyal' would cause a reaction from the 'dis-loyal'. When the loyal proclaim "I will stand firm", the dis-loyal might call out "I will overturn."[27]

The events of January and February were the catalyst for the colonial government finally deciding to take stronger action against its critics.[28] First though it needed to remove the Wild Schools Ordinance as a political issue. It had been surprised at the depth of the opposition and alarmed

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seizing on the slightest evidence, used the fact that a number of blank PNI Baru membership cards had been found on an executive member of the Bond van Inlandsche Marine Personnel to argue that there was a PNI Baru cell in the navy at Surabaya and that there was a clear connection between the mutiny and the general activities of PNI Baru. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 10 February 1933, V29 April 1933 – T9, NA.

[25] Van der Wal (ed.), *Herinneringen van Jhr. Mr. B.C. de Jonge*, p. 164. Sukiman's comments on the loyalist protest must have further aroused the ire of the government and the European community: "We understand the anger of the Dutch about what has occurred in the organisation whose prime function is to defend and safeguard colonial power here. Of course, the *sana* side has the right to defend its population with all its might, in the same way we have the right to demand the freedom of our land with all our might." *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 9 February 1933.

[26] *De School*, 3 March 1933, quoting a report from *De Koerier*, 23 February 1933.

[27] Articles by Syaranamual, *Sin Tit Po*, 9 February 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/7, p. 99.

[28] See, Governor-General to Minister of Colonies, 29 August 1933, in V 19 October 1933 – O24, NA.

that the issue had united Indonesian political and non-political organisations. It was also another issue that cut across the race divide, with the European labour union federation, the VVO, and the European teachers' union, the NIOG, publicly siding with Indonesian organisations. The protests showed no sign of abating. In December 1932 the normally conservative Budi Utomo threw its support behind the organisation of a support fund for victims of the Wild Schools Ordinance and stated that, if the government did not withdraw the Ordinance by 31 March the following year, its members would resign from the Volksraad and local councils.[29] On 3 February, just two days before the naval mutiny, the Director of Education informed the Volksraad that the government would accept a motion moved by Indonesian members to change the wording of the Ordinance so that private schools only had to notify the government, rather than seek its permission to operate.[30] Shaken by the mutiny, in mid-February the Governor-General announced that he would suspend the implementation of the Wild Schools Ordinance indefinitely. It was a shrewd move, which brought protest actions to an end and cleared the way for tough action against the political and labour movements.

If criticism in the colony and in the Netherlands had raised any doubts in De Jonge's mind about the wisdom of his intervention against the NIOG, they were swept away by the mutiny of *De Zeven Provincien*. On 14 February the VVO journal, *De West-Java Courant*, was banned for three weeks because of a series of articles over nearly two years, which culminated in an attack on the Budget Commission published on the day of the mutiny.[31] A week later the editor of *Soeara Oemoem*, Tjindarbumi, was arrested because of an article he had written on the mutiny and the role of Indonesian organisations.[32] He was subsequently jailed for 20 months.[33] The govern-

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[29] *Darmokondo*, 26 December 1932, in *IPO*, 1932/52, p. 425.

[30] Sukiman claimed the backdown as a great victory, arguing that the government had got inself into an impasse as it struggled to maintain its prestige in the face of a virulent campaign by the people. See, "Victorie", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 4 February 1933.

[31] *De West-Java Courant*, 18 February 1933. In July the VVO newspaper was banned for a further three weeks, which persuaded the federation to change its editors and turn it into a more cautious publication. *De West-Java Courant*, 13 July 1933.

[32] *Soeara Oemoem*, 22 February 1933. Tjindarbumi's article deviated from the labour unions' line that the actions of the mutineers was a tragic mistake. The offending paragraph read: "If the rebel group on the Zeven Provincien ship was wiped out, because it was not properly prepared to achieve victory, at the same time do not forget that while the ship was sailing and reports were flying back and forth, other sailors had enough time to strengthen their organisation and participate in the rebellion as an act of sympathy." Reported in *Soeara Oemoem*, 23 February 1933.

[33] The Indonesian press compared the heavy sentence for Tjindarbumi with the light sentences imposed on Reens and Vrijburg of the NIOG. All were accused of the same offence,

ment also decided to ban PNI Baru and Partindo at some future date if the political atmosphere did not improve. In the meantime, police were ordered no longer to tolerate anti-authority speeches at public meetings and not to hesitate to shut meetings down. All this was a clear signal to the Indonesian labour and political movements. It was also a signal to the European labour movement, particularly to member unions of the VVO. The government hoped that the mutiny would have a salutary affect on European labour unions, causing them to moderate their vocal opposition. But the message was clear. If they did not change their ways, being European provided no immunity from the wrath of the colonial State.

Public Sector Unions

Indonesian public sector unions entered 1933 despairing at the impact of the Depression on the colony. They had already seen substantial falls in membership and income and could foresee an even worse year ahead as further economies were implemented. The magazines of major unions such as the railway workers' union, the pawnshop workers' union, and the teachers' unions, had fewer pages and appeared less frequently because of a lack of money. There was also a much more pessimistic tone in their content. Hopes that the PVPN would become a powerful federation were fading. There was a deep sense of disappointment that for all their representations, and all the public protest meetings, the government was unmoved.

In July 1933 H. Sastroamidjojo resigned as chairman of the PBST. Two years earlier the union had hoped that the appointment of an 'outsider', on a full-time basis, would strengthen the organisation. It had not reckoned on a lengthy Depression. The PBST could no longer afford a full-time chairman. In 1932 it had an income of 8,412 guilders. In 1933 it had budgeted for an income of only 3,110 guilders and by mid-year even this was looking optimistic.[34] Paying a full-time chairman a salary of 150 guilders a month

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yet Reens was only fined 100 guilders and Vrijburg sentenced to 10 days jail, with the sentence deemed to have been served because of the preventive detention. It was seen as another example of one law for Indonesians and another for Europeans. See, *IPO*, 1933/19, pp. 302–304. Reens and Vrijburg were dismissed from their teaching jobs, but were permitted to retain their pensions. They returned to the Netherlands. In a private letter to Governor-General De Jonge in April 1933, the Minister of Colonies, Simon De Graaff, strongly supported the arrests and recommended they be dismissed as an example to others. See, De Graaff to De Jonge, 9 April 1933, in Van der Wal (ed.), *Herinneringen van Jhr Mr B.C. de Jonge*, pp. 410–412

[34] *Kareta Api*, August 1933.

was beyond its means. Sastroamidjojo had energetically promoted the PBST, spending a lot of time touring the branches and in public and private meetings explaining what the union was doing for ordinary railway workers. Had it not been for the Depression his efforts may have borne fruit. His replacement by a full-time State Railways worker forced a significant reduction in PBST activities.

As membership declined, tensions between members and the union executive surfaced. Criticism of the central executive was strong enough to persuade *Kareta Api* to confront the issue in May 1933. It criticised members who were blaming the union executive for being inefficient and too timid in its opposition to the economy measures. Nothing could be achieved, it argued, unless members made a strong commitment to the union. Before blaming the leadership for the union's decline, members should ask themselves five key questions. Did they accept the full responsibility of membership? Did they pay membership fees regularly? Did they attend branch meetings? If they attended branch meetings did they participate in discussions on how to improve the union? Had they approached non-members in their workplaces in order to explain the importance of the PBST and persuade them to join? Only if they answered positively to these questions, it argued, were they in a position to talk about mistakes by the union executive.[35]

These questions might well have been put to members of all Indonesian unions. Many union leaders would have shared *Kareta Api*'s analysis of the reasons for the weakness of the Indonesian labour movement. Only a minority of urban workers had ever joined a union and the level of commitment of many was low. That had always been a challenge for Indonesian labour unions. The Depression made the task even harder. With less money in their hands, and fewer prospects for promotion, payment of union membership fees assumed a lower priority. For many, unions had failed to live up to their expectations. The immediate benefits were no longer seen as worth the cost.

The PBST was forced to consider ways of stemming the loss of members. One obvious way was to revisit its constitution, which allowed only second class Indonesian railway and tramway workers to be members. The restriction had been in place since the union's formation in 1927 under the influence of the Spoorbond. The Spoorbond wanted no competition, considering itself the union for all first class railway and tramway workers, even

[35] *Kareta Api*, May 1933.

for those who were Indonesians. The PBST was not only under pressure because of falling membership but also because its Surabaya-based rival, the PBKI, had begun to recruit among State Railways workers in Surabaya and Yogyakarta. Unlike the PBST, it was open to both first and second class Indonesian railway workers. In mid-1932 the PBST Congress decided to allow first class Indonesian railway workers to join the union.

The initial response was disappointing. By the middle of 1933 only 17 first class workers had joined. The PBST believed that the major impediment was the class consciousness of first class workers who did not see themselves as 'beambten' (a subordinate public worker) but as 'ambtenaren' (a public official).[36] In July 1933 the union changed its name from PBST (Persatuan *Beambten* Spoor dan Tram) to the PPST (Persatuan *Pegawai* Spoor dan Tram), acknowledging that this was in order to appeal to the first class workers. The strategy was successful at one level. Within months many first class Indonesian railway workers joined, some of them former members of the Spoorbond.[37] However, the focus on recruiting first class workers probably contributed to the continuing fall in PPST membership and the growth of its rival, the PBKI. First class workers began to dominate many branch executives. This made second class workers uneasy, with accusations that the union was no longer concerned about lower paid workers.[38] Many second class workers reacted by leaving the union.

Since the onset of the Depression the Spoorbond and the PBST had worked together in an effort to fight cuts to railway workers' wages and conditions. They had organised joint protest meetings at major railway towns, with speeches translated into Indonesian or Dutch, leaders had spoken at each other's Congresses and they had presented common positions to the management of the State Railways. Their magazines had been mutually supportive, often reprinting each other's articles. The Spoorbond had supported the PBST in its opposition to the PBKI in Central and East

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[36] While the PBST believed that class consciousness was central to its failure to attract first class workers, who did not feel that there was a place for them in the union, it also argued that there was some resistance to paying higher fees than second class workers but only having the same rights as well as a fear that the PBST was mixed up in politics. See, *Kareta Api*, November 1932.

[37] *Kareta Api*, July 1932 and July, August, September and October 1933.

[38] See, for example, *Kareta Api*, July-August 1934 and 15 July 1937.

One example is the election of a new branch executive at Kutaraja at the end of September 1933. The chairman, secretary and treasurer were all first class clerks. *Kareta Api*, November 1933. Another is a new branch established at Kertapati in Central Java in June 1934. Of the 20 people who formed the branch about half were first class workers. *Kareta Api*, July-August 1934.

Java, accusing it of being created for political reasons, and arguing against Indonesian labour unions adopting what it called "nationalistic characteristics".[39] When in 1931 the PBST decided to join the International Transport Workers Federation, the Spoorbond rejoiced that there was such strong cooperation between the two railway workers' unions, stating that "Cooperation between our two unions is now more than ever assured."[40]

The PBST decision to recruit first class Indonesian railway workers strained this relationship. The Spoorbond stated that the change brought a regrettable nationalist characteristic to the PBST. A year later, with the change in name to PPST and some success in recruiting first class railway workers, the Spoorbond announced to its members that the PPST had made a declaration of war. It was now:

> … a labour organisation which is no longer a labour organisation, having abandoned labour union politics and gone over to general politics, having broken the undertaking to work together, and finally entered the territory of the race question[41]

The Spoorbond saw itself as the protector of workers on tier B wages. It accepted Indonesians promoted to the first class ranks, indeed it publicly supported the advancement of Indonesians in the workforce. But it was also desperate to maintain the difference between first and second class workers in order to protect the former's higher wages in the face of attacks from Indonesian labour unions. A union transgressing this status line was a threat.[42] It was fighting a defensive battle, which it increasingly feared it might lose. The Depression sharpened nationalist feelings among Indonesian workers with union leaders increasingly expressing resentment at the way in which the colonial state was supporting Europeans at their expense.

Railway workers' lack of commitment to the union was a constant theme in the pages of *Kareta Api*. In September, one contributor expressed disappointment at the low number of railway workers who joined the union and

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[39] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 January 1932.

[40] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 January 1931.

[41] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 July 1933. The PPST response, disagreeing that 'nationalism' had taken over the union and arguing that the decision would not affect its cooperation with European labour unions in general and the Spoorbond in particular, was published in *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 August 1933.

[42] The Spoorbond argued that "By joining the PBST there is a danger that Native middle level workers will no longer be seen as belonging to middle level ranks, which will only lead to an acceleration in the process of pushing B scales to A scales." *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 August 1932.

that of those who did join "… a large part still have the attitude of a Native, that is they are quickly bored." There were far too many people, he asserted, who wanted to be a union member and read its magazine but did not want to pay the membership fees.[43] A month later an editorial lamented that too many railway workers, whether second or first class, showed little interest:

> … unable to accept the changed times, still thinking fatalistically—accepting an increase in wages and then losing interest. Attitudes like this have no place in the twentieth century. They are no different from the attitude of a parasite, which wants to do no work and provides little support, but when the work is productive wants to participate fully in consuming the delicious fruit.[44]

The Depression-induced gloom within the PPST was shared by all labour unions. For the pawnshop workers' union the effects of the Depression were compounded by the on-going dispute between Sukiman and Surjopranoto on the one hand and Tjokroaminoto and Martodiredjo on the other hand. A referendum of members in January 1933 finally to decide on the chairmanship of the PPPH had resulted in overwhelming support for Sukiman. But the dispute did not go away.[45] It remained a public spectacle throughout 1933, with the Indonesian-language press revelling in accusations and counter-accusations. A public meeting in Yogyakarta in May saw some 3,000 people turn up to hear Sukiman, Surjopranto, Tjokroaminoto, Salim and Abikusno battle it out.[46] Whatever the merits of the dispute between the two parties, the real loser was the union itself as energy and resources were diverted from the problems it needed to confront.

In April 1933 the pawnshop service announced a third round of redundancies. Another 581 workers were to lose their jobs by the end of the year, taking the total redundancies so far to about 2,000, or one-third of the workforce. The PPPH somewhat wearily assured its members that it would continue to fight the redundancies in order to get the best deal it could, but that it had to change its strategy because "Protest is no longer heard or paid any attention." It acknowledged that the union was weak, lamenting

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43 *Kareta Api*, September 1933.

44 *Kareta Api*, October 1933.

45 According to the union, 1,204 of its 1,926 members voted in the referendum, of whom 1,051 voted for Sukiman. *Doenia Pegadaian*, 5–25 February 1933. Neither Tjokroaminoto nor Martodiredjo accepted that holding a referendum was permissable under the PPPH constitution and continued to dispute Sukiman.

46 *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 May 1933.

that there was "… not enough unity, not enough spirit in the movement, not enough strength to fight." It would now focus on seeking support from the wider Indonesian public, work with the PVPN and other unions in public protests, and seek support from the Netherlands and the international labour movement. Above all it would try to strengthen its own organisation. In the end workers' had to rely on their own power "… because the history of the world provides us with enough examples that there is nothing that will change workers' lack of rights other than the action of workers' themselves."[47]

Pawnshop workers on unemployment pay (wachtgeld) came under increasing pressure from local government officials to take alternative, lower status jobs. Many cases were reported of pawnshop workers on unemployment pay forced to work as caretakers, or police agents or in the customs service, under threat of losing unemployment pay if they refused. Government policy was wherever possible to move people off costly unemployment pay into any available job, no matter its pay or perceived status. Its overwhelming priority was to reduce public expenditure.

Status conscious former pawnshop workers resisted wherever they could. *Doenia Pegadaian*, the PPPH magazine, published regular stories of unemployed pawnshop workers being pressured into work they considered beneath them. One story recounted the experiences of Martosudiro, a pawnshop worker in Jember, East Java, who had been retrenched on unemployment pay. After some time on the reduced pay, he went to the Resident's office in Jember to ask if work at the same level as before could be found for him. To his surprise he was offered work as a policeman. He accepted. Later he was summoned to the Jember police station to get his uniform and instructions. He was told that he would be on night duty around the kampung. Martosudiro was surprised, but not brave enough to refuse. The story continued:

> On arriving home he showed the uniform to his wife and children who all cried, because they felt sad at the misfortune of their husband and father, who had never before done rough [kasar] work, becoming a policeman. The reaction of his family caused Marto immmediately to return to the police station with the uniform in order to reject the job as a policeman.[48]

The police chief angrily told Martosudiro that if he no longer wanted to be a policeman then his unemployment pay would be stopped. A week or so

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[47] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 10 April 1933.
[48] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 10 February 1934.

later, when he went to his pawnshop to receive his unemployment pay, he was told that it would no longer be paid.

Wounded pride that pawnshop workers were being forced to accept work beneath them was the theme of many letters to *Doenia Pegadaian*. A leading article in February 1934 sympathised with former pawnshop workers, arguing that they should not be expected to take lower status jobs such as guards or policemen. The article provides an insight into the sharp divide between those who considered themselves in 'halus' (white collar) work and 'kasar' (blue collar) workers. It was also a salutary reminder of how hard it was to create a strong labour movement in such a stratified society. The article argued:

> Especially in civil service circles, it has become the norm to enjoy high rank, to honour status, etc, which attitude of course begins in childhood when a child is urged by its father and mother to become a government administrator, obtain a high rank, become respected by the whole of society and obtain a noble title. In the past, a time when the civil service group had yet to experience the current difficulties, there was not one Indonesian who urged his child to become a capitalist or a large trader, rather many hoped that their child would become a civil servant, a priyayi, and acquire a title. The work that was most valued was that which constantly led to increased status, towards the highest possible rank, like the Internal Administration. Clerical work was not well paid, but people sought it because they hoped it would lead to them becoming a clerk in the Internal Administration and that this would put them on the ladder, enabling them eventually to become a Bupati.

The article concluded by arguing that one could not expect a pawnshop worker to become a guard or a policeman:

> We do not mean by this to belittle the job of a policeman. On the contrary, we appreciate the qualities of those who are good at this work. But a policeman does not possess the skills of a pawnshop officer, who understands administrative and similar matter. For this reason we feel that pawnshop officers are unsuited to the work of a policeman because they possess different skills. In order to be a policeman one must demonstrate courage and strength of body, but this is not enough to become a pawnshop officer.[49]

In order to keep faith with members, the PPPH raised particular cases with local managers and Residents. The PVPN joined in protesting to the pawnshop service management and to the government about the tactics used to force workers on unemployment pay into alternative jobs. They argued

[49] Ibid.

that the public sector regulations stated that unemployment pay could only be withdrawn if a worker rejected alternative work that was compatible with his previous work. A police agent, they argued, was not compatible with the work of a pawnshop employee.[50]

Union pressure was effective when pawnshop workers on unemployment pay were determined to hold their ground. A number of cases were reported of local pawnshop managers reluctantly reinstating a worker's entitlements. These were, however, a minority. Most accepted alternative work, however reluctantly. The pay was better than unemployment pay and, as the Depression deepened and unemployment became more and more visible in the kampung, they realised that the pawnshop service was unlikely to offer them their old jobs back and that after a few years their entitlements would cease. Any job was better than no job at all.

Teachers made redundant and placed on unemployment pay also felt humiliated by pressure to take low status jobs.[51] Unemployment among teachers grew sharply as the government reduced its education budget substantially. The federation of teacher unions, which changed its name from PGHB to Persatuan Guru Indonesia (PGI) at the beginning of 1933, responded by encouraging branches to provide practical support. At the beginning of 1934 it claimed a membership of around 20,000 in 174 branches, or more than half of the approximately 35,000 teachers in public schools. It reported that in response to the Depression every branch had created a cooperative or an unemployment support fund and that some branches had started small enterprises, such as laundries, shoe repair shops or barber shops, all of which provided jobs for unemployed teachers.[52] Using its reserve funds, it created a Crisis Group to assess proposals from unemployed teachers for loans to enable them to establish small businesses.[53] These measures alleviated the distress for some, but over the next few years all teachers' unions reported a stream of unemployed members turning up to union offices seeking help.

The PGI and its constituent unions lobbied the government, members of the Volksraad and even the Dutch parliament to try to reverse the reduc-

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[50] See, PVPN letter to pawnshop management and the government in *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 31 March 1934.

[51] In 1936 the village teachers' union cited two cases of assistant teachers who had been made redundant on unemployment pay but then pressured to become a caretaker and a jailer. The union intervened and the two teachers were allowed to stay on unemployment pay. *Tridaya*, January 1936.

[52] *Persatoean Goeroe*, 5 February 1934, p. 5

[53] *Persatoean Goeroe*, 15 May 1934, p. 62.

tion in public expenditure on education. Early in 1934 teachers from various teachers' unions in Mataram formed the Komite Penjokong Perguruan Indonesia (Committee to Support Indonesian Teachers), and produced a brochure urging Indonesians to support teachers' campaign against cuts in the education budget. The brochure lamented the low level of literacy in Indonesia, comparing it not only to European countries but also to the Philippines and Japan. It criticised the Hollandsche-Indies Onderwijs Commissie (Dutch-Native Education Commission) for complacency, arguing that under current policies it would be another 167 years before there was universal literacy in the colony. For Indonesia to progress, it argued, there must be mass education and for this to happen the government must increase both the education budget and the number of teachers.[54]

The brochure was widely distributed, too widely for the comfort of the Department of Education. Six teachers responsible for its production were suspended. Reports circulated that teachers who circulated the brochure would also be suspended or even dismissed. The Attorney-General finally decided in August that the six teachers would not be charged with any offence. For three months, though, the suspended teachers were on one-third of their normal wages. The implied threat of being targeted at a time when redundancies were being implemented was not lost on teachers.[55]

The PGI was a federation. The issue of whether or not it should remain a federation or become a unitary body was debated throughout the 1930s. In the end, the interests of individual teacher unions prevailed. The strength of the PGI depended almost entirely on its branches and this in turn depended on the willingness of local members of teacher unions to work together. This was often difficult to achieve given the status divisions within the ranks of teachers. Tensions between the teacher unions were exacerbated during the Depression because teachers at lower levels, or with fewer qualifications, felt the brunt of cuts in wages and jobs.

The Perserikatan Guru Bantu (assistant teachers' union—PGB) was particularly sensitive to other teacher unions treating it with disrespect. Founded in Solo in 1918 to represent assistant teachers in the native-language school system, those behind the new union believed that the PGHB was concerned primarily with promoting the interests of teacher training college teachers and those who had graduated from these colleges. Assistant teachers had been angered in 1915 when the government increased

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54 "Manifest Poesat KPPI", published in *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 6 April 1934.

55 See, *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 1 March, 29 March and 6 August 1934.

wages only for teachers who possessed a teacher training college diploma. They were angered even more by the fact that the PGHB accepted the decision without protest, despite their opposition. The PGB joined the PGHB but withdrew in 1925 because it believed the new structure of the PGHB, a middle way between a unitary body and federation, made it an ineffective advocate for teachers. Some Yogyakarta-based members disagreed, formed themselves into a rival union, the Sarekat Guru Bantu, which affiliated with the PGHB. For five years the two unions competed with each other but in 1930, with the onset of the Depression, the continued reductions in teachers' wages, and threats of significant reductions in the education budget, the two unions united into a new PGB, which immediately rejoined the PGHB. Its membership did not last long. When the 1934 BBL again reduced assistant teachers' wages more than those of other teachers, and the government announced that some 3,000 assistant teachers would either be dismissed or placed on unemployment pay, the PGB once again decided that the PGHB could not protect its members' interests and withdrew.[56]

The PGB was open to teachers who had not graduated from the teacher training colleges or who only possessed an assistant teacher diploma. In a colonial system, where pay was determined as much by level of education as by function, they were regarded as inferior to those who had graduated from a teacher training college, even when they were the head of a school. In 1936 the union pointed out that the salary range for assistant teachers was 16.5–35 guilders a month and that it took an individual 27 years to reach the top of the scale. In comparison, in 1907 the range was 20–40 guilders with an individual reaching the top of the scale in 24 years. Was there any other group of workers, it asked, being paid 25 per cent less than in 1907?[57]

The lowly position of assistant teachers in the education hierarchy, and the poor wages that came with it, were a constant source of complaint for a group that Volksraad member Soangkupan called " … the binding cement in respect of the mass of the population."[58] The union repeatedly approached the Department of Education to change the job title of its mem-

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[56] See, "Nasib Goeroe bantoe", *Tridaja*, March 1938, pp. 37–38, "Riwajat P.G.B.", *Persatoean Goeroe*, 1 March 1933, pp. 6–9, and "Congres PGHB di Solo", *Pemandangan*, 5 October 1938. Some teachers benefited from the acceleration of Indianisation during the Depression years. In 1935, for example, 300 expatriate European head teachers at HIS schools did not have their contracts renewed and were replaced by Indonesians (at lower salaries, of course). *Soeara Oemoem*, 21 December 1934.

[57] Annual Report for 1936, in *Tridaja*, January 1937, pp. 228–229.

[58] The Speech of Soangkupan is published in *Tridaja*, January 1938, pp. 9–14.

bers from *Guru Bantu* (assistant teacher) to *Inlandsche Volksonderwijzers* (native people's teacher). The word *bantu* had the connotation of a servant, while the Dutch title provided a due sense of the dignity of their work.[59] Union protests were to no avail.

The union magazine was replete with articles and letters from members complaining that they felt humiliated by their status in the educational system:

> Assistant teachers, who for so many years have been humiliated and easily attacked, are now conscious of their worth. Assistant teachers are now vocal in their support of organisation and unity, especially in order to protect their dignity, and provide a shelter from humiliation and attack.[60]

In October 1932 yet another union for teachers was created with the formation of the Normaal School Bond (NSB) in Yogyakarta. Normal school teachers in Yogyakarta argued that the desire for teacher unity was misplaced because of the significant differences in educational levels of teachers, as well as differences in status and function.[61] They wanted a union that exclusively represented their interests. One of the people behind the new union was Surjopranoto. Surjopranoto, along with the Yogyakarta group around Sukiman, had for some time been critical of the PGHB/PGI and its affiliated unions for being too cautious. But while he assumed the editorship of the new union's magazine, and wrote fiery articles for its first issue, his reputation and his association with Sukiman and PNI Baru made teachers' uneasy. In June 1933, branch delegates narrowly rejected his nomination as the inaugural NSB chairman. Instead they elected a teacher. In opposing his nomination, some delegates criticised Surjoprantoto for seeing a union more like a political party than a labour union. One said that he would be frightened to be a member of a union led by him. Others argued that the new union should move in a reformist rather than the radical direction that Surjopranto wished to move. Rejected as chairman, Surjopranto refused any further involvement in the union.[62] The NSB was only a small union. It never enrolled more than 300 members, almost all of whom taught in schools in Yogyakarta and Central Java. But it was one more

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[59] See the report on a meeting between the PGB and senior officials of the Department of Education in *Tridaja*, January 1935 and "Lagi-lagi Nasib PGB", *Tridaja*, May 1938, pp. 72–74.

[60] *Tridaja*, January 1935, p. 4.

[61] "Pokok keterangan NSB", *Sadar*, August 1933 and "NSB ers suka bersatu?", *Sadar*, September 1933.

[62] *Sadar*, June and July 1933.

example of how status divisions prevented the development of industry-based unions.

Labour Unions and Nationalist Politics

In the first half of 1933 Partindo and PNI Baru continued to expand their urban constituencies by increasing their influence within existing labour unions and by creating new unions. Sjahrir, from the PNI Baru, devoted most of his time to the development of a labour movement. He was neither a union organiser nor a member of a union executive. His was a different role. He was a theoretician, a teacher, and a source of inspiration to many who listened to him or read his writings.[63] He brought a sharp intellect to the labour movement, an intellect that looked beyond the day-to-day struggles to the social, economic and political structures needed to advance the interests of workers in an independent Indonesia. He was a tireless advocate, through the pages of PNI Baru publications, speeches at Congresses and lectures at PNI Baru and labour union meetings. A committed socialist in the tradition of the European social-democrats, his speeches and writings had a strong didactic tone as he sought to instruct PNI Baru members on political theory, the history of European labour movements, and the international dimensions of the struggle between capital and labour. Through 1932 and 1933 he argued that the failure of a powerful labour movement to emerge in Indonesia was in large part because too many labour unions were linked to political parties and because of this had failed to create strong, enduring organisations, able to combat employers. His reading of the history of the Indonesian labour movement was that unions were too dependent on political parties, whose interests did not necessarily coincide with theirs:

> Workers must have a labour union organised by workers themselves, in short workers must realise that they cannot improve their destiny other than through their own power, their own organisation, which truly promotes the interests of workers[64]

Sjahrir synthesised his thinking in a booklet, *Pergerakan Sekerdja* (the Labour Movement), published in 1933. He argued that an effective labour

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[63] For a biography of Sjahrir see Rudolf Mrazek, *Sjahrir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1994).

[64] Speech of Sjahrir to a PNI Baru public meeting in Semarang on 22 November 1932, reported in *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 30 November 1932.

movement must have two fundamental aims. First, to improve the lot of workers, within the context of a capitalist society. Second, to destroy capitalism and replace it with socialism. While the labour and political movements in Indonesia must be supportive of each other, he argued that they were quite separate movements. The remit of the labour movement was much wider than that of the political movement. It must not only oppose colonialism but also oppose capitalism, whether foreign or indigenous. The ultimate objective must be the creation of a socialist society:

> The cause of an independent nation is, of course, also a cause for workers, but the interests of workers do not end with an independent nation, rather they are only completed with the end of capitalism. In independent Indonesia there is no certainty of freedom for workers, for independent Indonesia could mean an increase in the rope, the political shackles, that bind workers.[65]

Pergerakan Sekerdja was probably the single most influential piece of writing on the thinking of labour union activists in the 1930s. It might be argued that there was little in it that was original. Labour union leaders in the social-democratic tradition in Europe and Britain had been making these arguments for decades. Others in colonial Indonesia had written extensively on theoretical and practical issues and Semaun, Sutomo, Drijowongso and Ruslan Wongsokusumo had all published short books explaining their views. *Pergerakan Sekerdja* was different, in that it presented a tightly integrated argument for social transformation and the creation of a socialist economy within a democratic political system where unions operated independently of political parties. Sjahrir's ideas resonated with many of the younger generation who became labour activists in the late 1930s as the colony was recovering from the Depression. *Pergerakan Sekerdja* was reprinted in 1947 and remained influential in the early years of independence and through the 1950s.

PNI Baru, led by Hatta and Sjahrir, continued to argue that while labour unions in a colony must have a political agenda they should operate independently of political parties. It was a view shared by Sartono, the formateur of the rival party Partindo. But after Sukarno joined Partindo in August 1932 Sartono's influence in Partindo waned. Sukarno differed from Sartono, Sjahrir, Hatta and Sukiman in his conviction that labour unions should be sub-units of political parties and closely tied to their political agendas. At the second Partindo Congress in April 1933 Sukarno's views prevailed. The

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[65] Sjahrir, *Pergerakan Sekerdja* (Jakarta: reprinted 1947), p. 23.

Congress adopted an action program on labour unions, which included the fundamental condition that labour unions must be based on political parties.[66]

As Partindo and PNI Baru increased their efforts to organise private sector workers in the major cities, they came into increasing competition with each other and with unions create by the PBI. They also came under close surveillance from government officials and employers. In the first few months of 1933 railway workers at Bantam, West Java, who were Partindo members, spread propaganda for the PBKI among fellow workers. State Railways management responded by transferring known Partindo members in its workforce and requiring others whom it suspected of Partindo sympathies to make a pledge of loyalty.[67] The monthly political intelligence reports increasingly focussed on PNI Baru and Partindo activists' work with labour unions, looking for the slightest sign of them influencing labour unions into more militant directions.

In Surabaya and Semarang, cities where PNI Baru labour union activity was especially strong, activists listened to Sjahrir and read his writings in *Daulat Ra'jat*, but often worked to their own agenda. The PNI Baru had been formed by an amalgamation of Independent Groups (Golongan Merdeka) in the major cities of Java and these groups retained a strong sense of their independence. The central executive tried to maintain discipline over branches as part of its policy of educating a strong leadership before seeking mass involvement. But it did not always have as much control as it would have liked. The largest union for private sector workers, the PBKI, increasingly came under the influence of the Surabaya and Semarang branches. The Semarang activists, in particular, adopted a less cautious approach than that of Sjahrir and the PNI Baru central executive. The first issue of the PBKI magazine in November 1932 stated that the union was not just going to represent workers to railway managements but would

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[66] "Partindo Party Program 1933–34", enclosed in Secret Mail Report 1933/694, NA. The key speech on labour unions for workers and farmers was delivered by Soediro. His ideas were not disimilar to those advocated by many political leaders over the past two decades, but in the Depression years they were a reminder to sensitive government officials that 'radical' ideas were still on the agenda of the national movement. Soediro argued that while labour unions were not political organisations they must be involved in politics because it was impossible in a colony to have a pure economic struggle. Capitalism and imperialism would not disappear of their own accord and it was therefore necessary for a class struggle and a national struggle simultaneously. An independent Indonesia was guaranteed to protect workers because all industries would be nationalised with strong social laws. A free Indonesia, he concluded, will bury capitalism and build a new society.

[67] PPO, April 1933, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934.

provide leadership in the struggle against the capitalist system. [68] Sjahrir would have agreed with the goal but would have cautioned to take a long time-frame, after organisational structures and quality leadership were securely in place. The Semarang PNI Baru people were less patient.

The PBKI grew rapidly in 1932 and 1933. In April 1932 it had nine branches in East Java and three branches for workers in the private railways in Central Java, including large branches in Semarang and Yogyakarta. One year later, in March 1933, it claimed a membership of 4,150 in over twenty branches, though as usual little more than a third paid their dues regularly.[69] This was still a significant achievement because growth was rare for Indonesian labour unions in the Depression years. Indeed, the PBKI had quickly become larger than the long-established union for State Railways workers, the PBST. Its success emboldened PBKI leaders in 1933 to begin to challenge the PBST in the State Railways, not only in Surabaya but also in the PBST heartland of West Java.

The PBKI central executive was based in the offices of the PBI in Surabaya and initially most of its leaders were PBI members. However, the private railway networks were centred on Semarang and Yogyakarta, far away from the control of Surabaya. Semarang PNI Baru activists quickly took control of the Semarang branch of the PBKI. In 1932 and 1933 they built the Semarang branch into by far the PBKI's largest and recruited workers into smaller branches along the central Java lines of the Semarang-based Netherlands-Indies Railway Company (NIS) and the Yogyakarta-based Sister Societies. As the PBKI grew so too did the Semarang branch of the PNI Baru, with new members attracted to the party through their involvement in the railway union.

Semarang had been the headquarters of the communist controlled VSTP, which had built a strong following among workers in the two Central Java-based private sector railways. Its successor, the Bandung-based PBST, had made little effort to recruit in the private railway systems. The speed of the PBKI's growth showed that the work of the VSTP had not been in vain. Worker consciousness had been permanently changed. The PBKI had a ready audience.

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[68] See, *Soeara PBKI*, November 1932, in IPO, 1933/1, p. 1. In February 1933 the PBKI Congress decided to change the name of the magazine to *Trompet PBKI*. The' PKBI Trumpet' was presumably seen as a more assertive title than the earlier 'PBKI Voice' and more in keeping with the union's self-image. *Sin Po*, 14 February 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/9, p. 130.

[69] See, PPO, March 1933, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934.

The PBKI's rapid growth was also aided by the considerable unrest among NIS workers in 1933 because the company had cut wages by a further 40 per cent. This was the third reduction since the onset of the Depression. By the company's own reckoning, the wages of full-time Indonesian workers were now around half of what they had been in 1930 and the wages for day-wage and casual workers more than 60 per cent lower. Pointsmen, for example, were paid in the range 17 to 27 guilders a month in 1930. In 1933 they were paid in the range 7.5–11 guilders. Shunters in 1930 were paid between 30 and 35 guilders a month, but in 1933 between 10 and 15 guilders.[70] These reductions were far higher than those in the State Railways. There was growing resentment among NIS workers at their treatment by the company. Indeed, in November 1932 Vorster, the head of the NIS in Semarang, warned his Board in the Netherlands that there was the possibility of labour unrest in the coming year as a result of the sharp reductions in wages at a time when workers were being required to work harder and for longer hours.[71]

The PBKI faced no competition as the Bandung-based PBST was focussed on State Railways workers. Vorster estimated that by early 1933 the PBKI had recruited as many as 1,000 members within the company, including 300 in the Semarang branch. He was particularly worried that, because the Semarang branch was under the control of PNI Baru activists, many NIS workers had not only joined the PBKI but also joined the PNI Baru. For some months he had been warning his Directors in the Netherlands about what he saw as growing unrest as a result of the "extremist" actions of PNI Baru and Partindo, concluding that the tone of recent native political and labour union meetings showed "… that the influence of Russia is growing and leaders are increasingly knowledgeable about communist terminology."[72]

The *Zeven Provincien* mutiny hardened Vorster's attitude towards the PBKI. His weekly reports no longer blamed the tension and unrest among the company's Indonesian workers on wage cuts but on PBKI agitation. A conflict between the company and its Indonesian workforce, he said, was

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[70] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 15 September 1932.

[71] Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No. 70, 16 November 1932, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA.

[72] Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No. 80, 8 February 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA.

likely in the near future.[73] He was not prepared to wait for this to happen. He began a series of discussions with the government, with senior European members of the Volksraad and with fellow members of the Batavia-based employers association seeking support for a pre-emptive strike against the PBKI. He emphasised that the rapid growth of the PBKI, its close connection with PNI Baru and its efforts to expand into the larger State Railways network threatened to create a union as dangerous as the earlier VSTP. By the middle of the year Vorster was confident that he had government and employer support for his plan to ban NIS workers from PKBI membership.[74]

The PBKI held it second annual Congress at Semarang in February 1933. The choice of Semarang reflected the dominance of the Semarang branch and the strength of PBKI membership within the NIS network in Central Java. The key speaker at the Congress public meeting was advertised as Mohammad Hatta, chairman of PNI Baru, confirming in the eyes of NIS management and government officials that the union was under PNI Baru control. On the eve of the public meeting that accompanied all union Congresses, PBKI leaders were summoned by the Semarang Resident and warned that there could be no discussion of either the naval mutiny or the Wild Schools Ordinance. Some 3,000 people at the public meeting heard the union chairman relate his meeting with the Resident and the prohibitions. The PBKI meeting lasted only half an hour before the police closed it on the grounds that the chairman's speech had become too political. The audience was told that the union could only achieve its objectives through its own power not by making requests of employers. The chairman went on to speak of the impact of imperialism and capitalism on Indonesia and the profits made by European companies while at the same time causing the death of many people. At this point he was stopped. Hatta had no op-

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[73] Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No. 82, 1 March 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA. In February 1933 he provided an example to support his case that there was a real danger that the unrest in the native world would lead to something more significant. He told the story of a caretaker employed by NIS at Semarang who was heavily involved in the opposition to the Wild School Ordinance. Warned by police that if he continued this activity he might be arrested, the caretaker stated that the law only applied to Europeans and that he would not submit to it because he did not agree with it. When Vorster heard of the incident he sacked the caretaker, telling him that there was no place in NIS for someone with this sort of attitude. Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No. 81, 15 February 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA.

[74] Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No. 97, 18 July 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA.

portunity to speak. To the chagrin of the police, and the railway company management, as the audience left the hall they sang the Indonesia Raya, and called out "Hidup Indonesia Merdeka, Hidup PBKI, Hidup Hatta." (Long live Indonesian Independence, Long live the PBKI. Long live Hatta) before being forcibly dispersed.[75]

The PBKI Congress marked the beginning of a sharper tone to its public meetings as it sought to capitalise on railway workers' discontent over wage cuts. It began to expand from its Central Java, private railway base into the State Railways network in a direct challenge to the PBST. State Railways workers in Central Java were encouraged to join existing PBKI branches and new branches were created in Bandung and Surabaya with the assistance of PNI Baru activists.[76] Increased activity met a strong reaction from railway managements. In April the union central executive began to receive reports of threats to workers who were union activists from both the NIS and the Sister Society managements. In Surabaya, the local NIS inspector demanded a membership list from a member of the executive. When this was refused he suspended him.[77] Supervisors worked closely with the local police to compile lists of union members at individual stations and depots and pressured railway workers to stay away from the union. In mid-May, two senior NIS Indonesian deputy supervisors, were dismissed on grounds of "unsuitability" because they were members of PBKI branch executives. When one of them asked the European manager who sacked him the reason for NIS opposition to the PBKI, he was told that the PBKI was like the sailors' union whose members had mutined in February.[78]

The PBKI central executive in Surabaya tried to allay the fears of railway managements and government officials by stressing that it was a labour union, not a political party. A press release in April, for example, drew attention to its statutes, which stated that the PBKI was not involved in politics and was not a sub-unit of any political party. Where a society was based on capitalism, it argued, there must be labour unions and labour unions must be concerned with improving the life of workers. While the PBKI understood the importance of the political movement to achieve

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[75] *Soeara Oemoem*, 14 February 1933.

[76] In Bandung the key person was Maskun, now a PNI Baru leader. Maskun had been one of the four PNI leaders arrested and jailed in December 1929. On his release he became a prominent member of the Independent Groups and then of the PNI Baru. See, *Soeara Oemoem*, 30 May 1933.

[77] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 4 April 1933.

[78] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 15 May 1933.

independence from colonial rule, as a labour union operating in a capitalist society it believed that independence on it own was insufficient to improve the lives of workers:

> … Indonesian workers must understand, and be convinced, that 'Indonesia Merdeka', on its own, is unable to ensure that the stomachs of hungry workers will be filled, is unable to ensure that the livelihood of Indonesian workers will be improved.[79]

On the ground, the PBKI was positioning itself as a more radical alternative to the Bandung-based PBST. In June, the secretary and treasurer of the central executive, Udin and Djojosuprapto, embarked on a propaganda tour through railway towns on the State Railways network in East Java. When asked by railway workers what the difference was between the PBKI and the PBST, Udin was reported to have answered that the PBKI protected workers' collective rights whereas the PBST did not:

> … the PBST seeks to improve the destiny of its members through quiet negotiations with employers, while the PBKI moves along the path of education and consciousness raising of Indonesian railway workers about their rights as workers, in order that through the power of united action, full of a spirit raging strongly and unwaveringly, they bravely struggle to demand and defend an improvement in their destiny.[80]

The PBKI central executive in Surabaya was becoming increasingly concerned about NIS management's attitude to the union and even more concerned about the possible reaction of Semarang leaders. It feared that it had lost control over Semarang and that, despite the union's public position, the PNI Baru members who controlled the branch were linking union activities to PNI Baru politics. On 16 May it warned that it had received reliable reports that provocateurs were moving around the NIS stating that the PBKI would strike in May or June. Members were urged to exercise restraint in the face of this provocation:

> Brother PBKI-ers, especially brother branch leaders! Be careful and pay attention!
>
> This is a time of provocation! Our PBKI is being targeted by its opponents. Therefore be strong and guard our fortress so that it is not breached or destroyed by the enemy![81]

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[79] PBKI Press Committee, "Sikap PBKI terhadap politiek dan partai politiek", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 5 April 1933.

[80] *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 June 1933.

[81] *Soeara Oemoem*, 16 May 1933.

The Surabaya central executive had every reason to be worried. On 6 June, Vorster informed his Directors that he no longer considered the PBKI to be a labour union. It was more like a political party "… which directs itself against capital and spreads propaganda that capital must be opposed." He intended to ban NIS workers from being members of the PBKI, even though this would probably lead to short-term conflict.[82] His justified the ban "… on the basis that through its actions this organisation has shown that it is not a labour union, merely inciting loyal employees against their employer."[83] He had already been informed that the government intended to prohibit government workers from being members of PNI Baru and Partindo. He would wait for the government to move before implementing NIS bans on the PBKI. Meanwhile contingency plans would be developed to ensure that the Company's operations would not be disrupted.

Indonesian Workers' Congress

The Indonesian Workers' Congress was held in Surabaya in the first week of May 1933. It was a difficult time for the labour and political movements. The government was intensifying its warnings to PNI Baru and Partindo leaders, increasingly jailing writers and banning newspapers for transgressions of the press laws. Organised by the PBI and held in the Indonesian National Building, over four days Congress delegates listened to attacks on colonialism and capitalism, with many speakers linking the labour movement to the political movement. The key speakers were Sukarno from Partindo, Sjahrir from the PNI Baru and Sutomo from the PBI, each of whom had prepared advisory papers for the Congress. In a long speech on the principles that should drive the organisation and ideology of the Indonesian labour movement Sukarno argued passionately "… that the labour movement must engage in politics." Sjahrir agreed, though unlike Sukarno he wanted unions to be independent of political parties. Sutomo was a dissenting voice, expressing concern about the views of both Sukarno and Sjahrir and maintaining that the labour movement should be kept quite separate from the political movement.[84]

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[82] Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No. 93, 6 June 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA.

[83] Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No, 94, 19 June 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA.

[84] See, "Report on the first Indonesian Workers' Congress held at Surabaya, 4–7 May 1933", enclosed in Adviser for Native Affairs to Governor-General, 29 May 1933, Secret Mail

Sutomo and the PBI had already been outmanouvered in the Surabaya-based labour union federation, the PSSI. In March, two months before the Indonesian Workers' Congress, the Surabaya labour activist and PBKI secretary Udin announced the reorganisation of the PSSI. Its executive was now in the hands of nominees of the PBKI and other unions controlled by PNI Baru or Partindo activists.[85] The Indonesian Workers' Congress completed the reorganisation by dissolving the PSSI and creating a new labour union federation, the Centraal Perhimpunan Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian labour union federation—CPBI).[86]

The CPBI intended to differentiate itself from the PVPN and the old PSSI. It would not be a mere reformist organisation, it said, but an organisation that struggled for radical changes to Indonesia's economic structures. To this end there must be a clear distinction between the "sini" (us—meaning Indonesians) and the "sana" (them—meaning Europeans). The CPBI was based on "kebangsaan Indonesia": only Indonesians could join its member unions.[87] It rejected cooperation between the Indonesian and the European labour movements in the colony as long as there were different conditions of work.[88] In a proclamation at the end of the Congress, the PNI Baru members who dominated the CPBI asserted that they were much closer to the people than those who led other labour unions and political parties. Using the language of PNI Baru publications, they proudly proclaimed that they did not have titles such as Mr. Dr. or Ir. (honorifics for a lawyer, a doctor or an engineer). The Congress, they argued, was organised by workers themselves and the new federation had emerged from below. It was largely rhetoric, but it did reflect their disdain for the leadership and

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Report 1933/689, NA. For a clear exposition of the Partindo position on labour unions see Gatot Mangkupradja, "Organisasi Sarekat Sekerdja", *Persatoean Indonesia*, 10–2-30 May 1933, pp. 1–9.

85 "Reorganisasi PSSI", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 8 March 1933.

86 The Statutes are printed in *Soeara Oemoem*, 18 May 1933.

The political intelligence service saw the involvement of Sukarno and Sjahrir in the CPBI as a danger to the State, warning "… because it can be anticipated that both of these leaders of revolutionary organisations will use their influence in the labour movement to drive it in the direction they favour, that is to mobilise the masses in their struggle against established authority." PPO, May 1933, in Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politoneele Overzichten*, Vol. 3, 1931–1934.

87 *Soeara Oemoem*, 18 May 1933. See also, a report on a CPBI meeting at Solo on 6 July, in *Adil*, 7 July 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/28, pp. 41–42.

88 There are extensive reports on the Indonesian Workers' Congress in *Soeara Oemoem*, 5, 8 and 9 May 1933.

direction of many of the existing labour unions, particularly those led by the PBI.[89]

In the days immediately after the Congress, sympathetic Indonesian newspapers supported the formation of the CPBI. The Sukiman/Hatta edited *Oetoesan Indonesia* explained that the Indonesian labour movement was entering into a "second phase". It considered the creation of a left-wing labour union federation a natural consequence of the separation of the political movement into left-wing and right-wing parties. The "second phase" would evolve into a "third phase" with the development of a struggle program and methodology. This struggle, it argued, needed leaders with experience in both the political and the labour union spheres. Cooperation between 'left' and 'right' in the labour movement was no longer possible.[90] In Surabaya, the former PKI member Sosrokardono argued that with the creation of the CPBI the Indonesian labour movement was once again uniting "grove" (manual) and "fijn" (white collar) workers. These two groups had earlier been united in the PVH, but the destruction of labour unions connected to the PKI had seen the "fijn" workers organise themselves separately in the PVPN. A new day had dawned, coinciding with the renewal of the political movement.[91]

The creation of the CPBI brought to a head long-standing disagreements on the direction of the labour movement. Sukarno engaged in a sharp exchange with the editors of the Surabaya-based newspaper *Soeara Oemoem* and the Batavia-based newspaper *Pemandangan*. Saeroen, editor of *Pemandangan*, argued that while he sympathised with the motives behind the Indonesian Workers' Congress, he had some problems with it. He believed that labour union involvement in party politics would lead to schism in the labour movement and would provide another weapon for employers to use against workers.[92]

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[89] The proclamation was published in *Soeara Oemoem*, 9 May 1933. An example of similar language is an article published by the PNI Baru in December 1931 which, in referring to the leadership of the Marhaen, stated that, "The title Prof, Dr, Mr, Ir, is not enough if they do not possess a firm heart and a powerful spirit." "Kodrat Perdjoangan Indonesia Merdeka", *Daulat Ra'jat*, 20 December 1931. A letter to the editor of *Soeara Oemoem*, responding to a critical article on the CPBI, stated that the CPBI aimed for persatuan not per-sate-an [real unity not the kind of unity created by combining separate bits of meat on a stick]. Again this was the language of the PNI Baru when referring to attempts to create unity in the political movement. *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 May, 1933.

[90] "Phase ke-doea", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 10 May 1933.

[91] *Sesoeloeh Oemoem*, 9 May 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/20, p. 309.

[92] *Pemandangan*, 13 May 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/20, p. 308.

J.D. Syaranamual, editor of the *Soeara Oemoem*, agreed that capitalism must be overthrown but argued that it was not the labour movement as such which had the responsibility to overthrow it. An effective labour movement had to be united, but given the diversity of political views in Indonesia how could it be united, he asked, if it had to follow one political direction? When people used Marxist language were they arguing that labour unions should be based on Marxism, or on communism or the way of labour unions in England? Should they be based on religious belief as many were in the Netherlands? Which of the nationalist parties should they follow? If political parties got involved with labour unions, he concluded, unions would fight each other, thereby weakening their position against employers.[93]

Pemandangan was more blunt. Pointing to the failure of previous attempts to create labour union federations in the colony, it argued:

> If the Trade Union Federation has political content also, then in the near future there will be an inquiry from one or other union that wants to join it: what are the politics of the executive?
>
> That is certain and we have had enough examples of it in the past. Trade Unions should be free from politics. This is necessary too, so as not to have requests for improvement of conditions directed to the employers immediately branded as 'politics', thus closing the door to negotiations. Opposition, even though it is sound, will lose some of its value if there is reason to accuse it of being based on politics.
>
> Let the labour movement remain an organisation of trades; for those who are fond of politics, their place is the people's movement, they can become members of political parties.[94]

Sukarno responded with a pithy article in his journal *Fikiran Ra'jat* in which he ridiculed the timidity of the editor of *Soeara Oemoem*:

> ... for him a trade union is not a fighting body but a begging one! For him, a trade union is not a weapon with which the workers' can demand improvements of their lot, but a kind of request office whose task is begging.

He concluded with a resounding call for workers to unite against exploitation:

> Dialectics indeed requires that there be an uncompromising struggle between capital and labour—dissolving any agreement between these two "poles"

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93 "Politiek dan Pergerakan Sekerdja", *Soeara Oemoem*, 31 May 1933.

94 Quoted in Sukarno, "May Trade Unions Engage in Politics?", in Sukarno, *Under the Banner of Revolution* (Jakarta: 1966), p. 216. I have used the translation from this English language edition of Sukarno's writings.

> of society. Dialectics too requires that the capitalist pole will some day be defeated by the labour pole—the pole of capitalism will be defeated by the pole of the proletariat, and be replaced by a new synthesis, the synthesis of a world without class.
>
> Workers, throw out your chests, take courage, forge your sinews and muscles, and fight with all your heart and soul.
>
> "You can only lose your chains, on the other hand, you will gain a glorious new world!"
>
> So said one of your greatest leaders. Make those words come true in the fire of your Banteng spirit.[95]

Soeara Oemoem ended the debate by stating that the PBI would have nothing to do with the CPBI because of the "politics clause". It regretted that those intent on reorganising the labour movement lacked an understanding of recent history. Citing the times of Tjokroaminoto and Semaun, it reminded its readers that labour union federations linked to politics did not last long in Indonesia before their differences caused them to break apart.[96]

These were fundamental differences. Sjahrir and those who supported the CPBI analysed Indonesia in class terms and were convinced that a class struggle was the only way to create a fair and just society. The PBI people in Surabaya were opposed to the idea of a class struggle, as *Soeara Oemoem* made clear in its May Day editorial. It stated that while it respected that May Day symbolised the struggle of workers to achieve just and good goals, it did not want politics in Indonesia to be defined by class struggle:

> As nationalists, we do not want a class struggle, such as is meant by those who celebrate 1 May. We do not want division within our own nation. We do not want government exclusively by the proletariat (dictatorship of the proletariat). What we want is a society that provides a good place for all groups within our nation. What we want is a harmonious society, able to create consensus among different groups in our nation[97]

The tone of CPBI public meetings alarmed the colonial government. At a meeting in Solo, Central Java, at the beginning of June one speaker described the CPBI was an organisation dedicated to acting in accordance with Marxist theories. Another speaker, after telling the audience that capitalism must be eliminated "root and branch", compared unemploy-

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[95] This was originally published in *Fikiran Ra'jat* 1933. I have used the translation in "May Trade Unions Engage in politics", in Sukarno, *Under the Banner of Revolution*, pp. 215–223.

[96] *Soeara Oemoem*, 8 May 1933.

[97] *Soeara Oemoem*, 2 May 1933.

ment in Europe with Russia where, he said, the state provided work for all.[98] But the optimism of some that the CPBI marked a "second phase" in the evolution of the labour movement was premature. PNI Baru and Partindo activists continued their involvement in labour unions, most of which were nominally members of the CPBI, but did so with little apparent reference to the CPBI.[99] Nevertheless, the tenor of the Indonesian Workers' Congress, and the creation of the CPBI under the chairmanship of Sjahrir, confirmed the colonial government in its view that it must continue to rein in the Indonesian labour and political movements. It feared a shift in the Indonesian labour movement towards more overtly political activity. To a colonial state and a European community unbalanced by the deepening of the Depression, staunchly anti-communist and still in a state of shock from the naval mutiny, the intensity of the anti-capitalist and class struggle language was increasingly reminiscent of the PKI.

Railway Workers and 'Passive Resistance'

In opening the Volksraad in June 1932, Governor-General De Jonge had issued a warning to the Indonesian nationalist movement and to both Indonesian and European labour unions. One year later, in opening the 1933 Session of the Volksraad, he left no doubt as to where he was heading:

> The government may, and must, demand loyalty from its civil servants under all circumstances, including when there are difficult matters for them or when they have a different view, while people who are civil servants must realise that there is no place in government service for those who refuse to cooperate with the government, either through actively campaigning against it or passively withholding their loyalty and dedication.[100]

On 27 June the government prohibited government workers from membership of Partindo or PNI Baru, required all public sector unions to have at least one employee on its central executive and demanded that central executives sign pledges of allegiance. Moreover, European and Indonesian naval personnel were forbidden from being members of, or supporting, any organisation based on social-democratic principles. One month later, on 1

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[98] *Adil*, 7 July 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/28, 9, p. 441.

[99] In addition to the three foundation members (PBKI, SCI and PPDI) in July 1933 the CPBI accepted nine more unions as members. All were small unions for private sector workers in the major cities in Java. *Soeara Oemoem*, 28 July 1933.

[100] *Volksraad Handelingen*, 15 June 1933.

August, Sukarno was arrested and tight restrictions placed on the Partindo and PNI Baru.[101]

This was the catalyst for NIS management to implement its own anti-union plans. On 5 July it banned employees from PBKI membership, stating that any worker who refused to leave the union would be dismissed. A few days later, workers were informed that if dismissed they would never again be employed by the company. This was the coordinated pre-emptive strike against the union that Vorster had been planning for months.

PBKI leaders were taken by surprise. For over a year their message to railway workers had been that the PBKI was a strong, assertive union, not like the weak Bandung-based PPST. They had promised that the union would support them when they stood up for their rights and demanded better wages and conditions. They had constantly talked up the power of mass action. In this context, Semarang leaders felt that they could not simply capitulate at the first sign of pressure from employers, otherwise they would lose all credibility and their work would have been in vain. The only alternative was to persuade members to defy the order in large enough numbers to put pressure back on the company. The company had to be confronted. Some 4,000 pamphlets urging "passive resistance" were quickly printed and distributed along the NIS network. If workers' gave in now, it was argued, they would leave themselves open to more oppression in the future. They were assured that if they stuck with the union the company would not be able to operate and would be forced to backdown. "DO NOT BE AFRAID!!" it stated, "the PBKI is not an organisation banned by the government"[102] The Gundih branch coined the defiant slogan "Better crushed than submit and continue to live in servitude."[103]

Perhaps PBKI Semarang leaders convinced themselves that NIS management would back down. It was reported that they told a heated branch executive meeting that sacked workers could seek work with the other major Central Java private railway network, the Sister Societies, which had not banned the union.[104] If they were convinced of their strength then they seriously over-estimated members' commitment to the union and under-

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[101] See, Ingleson, *Road to Exile*, pp. 215–216.

[102] "Lijdelijke Verzet PBKI. Ma'loemat PBKI Tjabang Semarang", Appendix to Semarang Police Headquarters, Political Intelligence Service Branch, 13 July 1933, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 20 July 1933, Secret Mail Report 1933/879, NA.

[103] *Sikap*, 11 July 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/28, p. 438.

[104] Semarang Police Headquarters, Political Intelligence Service Branch, July 1933, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 20 July 1933, Secret Mail Report 1933/879, NA.

estimated the power of NIS management. PBKI membership in the NIS was far too small, and far too vulnerable, to deter a NIS management determined to destroy the union. NIS workers were unhappy that their wages had been reduced again in January, but in the depths of the Depression above all else they needed to hang on to their job.

Many of the smaller PBKI branches on the NIS network, under pressure from NIS managers, ignored the pleas from Semarang and quickly recommended that members resign in order to keep their jobs.[105] NIS managers were well prepared, with lists of PBKI members in their workplaces. They were summoned by supervisors and told to resign or be sacked. Fearing the worst, the PBKI Semarang branch executive had secretly designated a number of reserve executives to take over if they were arrested, but NIS managers quickly found out. All but 18 resigned from the union after they were presented with an ultimatum. Those that did not were immediately dismissed, and given 24 hours to vacate their company-owned houses.[106]

The PBKI central executive was not happy with the unilateral action taken by the Semarang branch. For some months it had been urging caution in the face of company provocation. Key members of the executive rushed to Semarang, where they urged a branch meeting to abandon the idea of passive resistance because it had little chance of success. Workers were urged to consider the suffering that would be inflicted on their families if they lost their jobs. They argued that the branch executive should follow a "diplomatic" route by seeking discussions with NIS management.[107] This advice was rejected. Semarang leaders were convinced that they had to respond strongly to employer oppression.

Having failed to dissuade Semarang leaders to change course, the PBKI central executive decided that it must publicly support the passive resistance campaign. For nearly two weeks its chairman, Djokosudjono, himself a PNI Baru member, joined branch leaders as they travelled around PBKI branches on the NIS network, imploring members to stick with the union and promising support if they were dismissed.[108] In appealing to other labour unions for support, the PBKI accused NIS of trying to destroy the

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105 Ibid.

106 *Soeara Oemoem*, 8 August 1933.

107 This meeting was reported extensively in *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 15 August 1933 and *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 August 1933. See also, Semarang Police Headquarters, Political Intelligence Service Branch, 13 July 1933, in Secret Mail Report 1933/879, NA.

108 See, Semarang Political Intelligence Service reports in Secret Mail Report 1933/879 and Secret Mail Report 1933/946, NA.

union so that it could do whatever it wanted to reduce costs. It rejected NIS claims that that it had never tried to establish contact with management but instead had stirred up the workforce. While it acknowledged that there had been no contact with NIS management, this was not the fault of the union:

> Because we are of the opinion that any labour union is not—indeed, must not—be dependent on the employer. We did want contact with the employer (PBKI and employer) but any contact had to be on a basis of mutual respect. If a relationship is based on the opposite of mutual respect, above all if the PBKI must be submissive and obedient, then we most certainly do not want it. The PBKI was created and organised not to be submissive and obedient in situations that are not in keeping with its principles. The PBKI is a labour union that must be continually watchful. The interest of its members is in justice, and it must bravely condemn anything which is unjust.[109]

A leading article in *Soeara Oemoem* probably reflected the concerns of PBKI leaders in Surabaya who were PBI members rather than members of PNI Baru or Partindo. While commending the need for workers to struggle to protect their rights, it cautioned that it was the responsibility of leaders to assess the risks in a particular struggle, ensure that tactics were appropriate and, more than anything, ensure that it had a resiliant organisation. Otherwise only defeat would ensue. Readers were reminded that as a result of the Depression tens of thousands of educated people and even greater numbers of uneducated people were looking for work. Workers could easily be replaced. Was this the right time to take on employers, it asked? Despite these reservations the newspaper acknowledged that it could not undo what had been done, "… the issue has already been decided. Victims are already falling. Now is not the time to ask who is at fault. Now we have to provide support. Wherever possible, by people who have the opportunity. "[110]

While the government would have expected the PBKI central executive to support the passive resistance campaign led by the Semarang branch, to its great annoyance the PVPN also came out in support, as did most nationalist political parties and many non-political organisations. Both the PNI Baru and Partindo central executives were caught by surprise by the PBKI passive resistance campaign. Like PBI leaders they did not have the same confidence as Semarang in the likelihood of success. When the Sema-

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[109] "Maklumat dari pengurus besar PBKI kepada kaum buruh Indonesia terutananja dan ra'jat Indonesia oemoemnja", *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 July 1933.

[110] *Soeara Oemoem*, 11 July 1933.

rang PBKI leaders first approached them for support they hesitated, using the excuse that they had not yet had time to consider their positions. Whatever qualms they had about the strategy, they eventually supported the union. But their support was lukewarm. They knew that in the face of the government backing of NIS management and the economic vulnerability of workers, passive resistance could not succeed.[111]

The union and political movements had to protest and protest loudly. A "day of action" was organised by labour unions and political parties in the major towns and cities in Java on 13 August. Many of the meetings were dispersed by the police, because of the presence of Partindo or PNI Baru members.[112] Surjopranoto was the main speaker in Yogyakarta. In a passionate speech he defended the PBKI and attacked employers for their refusal to engage with labour unions. He rejected NIS management claims that the PBKI was trying to create disturbances. On the contrary, he said, it was merely acting as a labour union should by promoting the interests of workers and seeking to represent them to the company. Like many other political and union leaders he accused the company of having planned the action against the PBKI in order to reduce its labour costs by sacking older, long-standing workers and replacing them with new, younger and cheaper workers. [113]

Protests were sent to the Governor-General, questions were raised in the Volksraad and the Indonesian press condemned the attack on workers' right of association. Even non-political organisations queried the justice of NIS management preventing workers from joining a union when all they were doing was engaging in legal activity.[114] The CPBI spread a manifesto

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[111] See, *Sikap*, 22 July 1933, in *IPO*, 1933/32, pp. 494–495. *Daulat Ra'jat*, the journal of PNI Baru, called on NIS workers to stand firm even if many were dismissed because the company could not dismiss everyone. It described the government's reaction as a symptom of the crisis of capitalism. See, *Daulat Ra'jat*, 20 July 1933. Sukiman delivered a strong speech at the July Congress of the PPPB in which he stated that the union "… supports and helps this labour union action. All labour unions are united." See, *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 August 1933.

[112] The venue for the meeting in Bandung was decorated with PNI Baru emblems. The speakers at the meeting in Semarang included five Partindo and PNI Baru members. The meeting was shut down by the police. See the reports in *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 15 August 1933, and *Pemandangan*, 30 December 1933. The protest meetings only confirmed Vorster in his view "… that the PBKI is a sub-unit of an extreme left-wing political organisation." Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No, 94, 15 August 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA.

[113] The speech was reported in *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 August 1933.

[114] See, for example, the editorial in the Muhammadiyah journal which questioned the justice of employers, in effect, stating that that workers had to work according to their rules or be unemployed. *Adil* (n.d.—August 1933?), in *IPO*, 1933/28, p. 434.

reiterating its view that workers had been sacked by the NIS, not because they were stirring up unrest nor because they were on strike, but simply because they were defending their rights as workers:

> For this reason the struggle of Indonesian workers in the PBKI is your struggle, defending your social rights and your rights as a worker. Support the PBKI struggle with all your strength.
>
> Show your unity of spirit in the face of the difficulties and struggle![115]

Almost all of the around 1,000 PBKI members in NIS quickly acceded to the company's demand. In the end, only 84 workers were dismissed after refusing to resign from the union. About 50 of them were members of the Semarang branch. Government and NIS reports indicate that around two-thirds of those dismissed were skilled workers, with a significant number of telegraphists and conductors and smaller numbers of engine-drivers and clerks.[116] A majority of those dismissed were members of PNI Baru with a few members of Partindo.[117]

The passive resistance failed. NIS operations were hardly affected. Voster was pleased with the success of his actions, informing his Board that, "I now believe that success has been achieved with great advantages for our side, which outweigh the cost, so that in the years immediately ahead, which will be difficult ones, we will at least be free of problems with the workers."[118] In November 1933 the PKBI leadership in Surabaya decided that there was no point in continuing and dissolved the union. It immediately established a new union, the Sarekat Sekerja Umum. This tactic quickly failed when railway company managements banned workers from joining.

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[115] The manifesto was printed in *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 August 1933.

[116] Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No. 102, 25 July 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, ARA. Of the 63 people dismissed by 25 July, there were four station clerks, seven conductors, 14 telegraphists, three warehousemen, four drivers and three deputy drivers.

[117] The political intelligence service at Semarang had a spy inside the PBKI. Vorster informed his Directors in The Netherlands that he had set aside some money to pay this spy: "This money relates to the wages of a second class station clerk who for some time has been an informant for the political intelligence service on the mood among Native workers in our Company. In the context of the difficult days as a result of the PBKI action, at the request of the PID I dismissed this man so that he was still in a position to provide valuable information. However, I am retaining his salary in this fund so that when the matter has been forgotten, maybe by 1 January 1934, he will be employed again." Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No. 109, 10 October 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA.

[118] Chairman of the Executive Committee (Vorster) to Chairman of the Board of Directors, No. 102, 15 August 1933, NIS Archives, Box 272, NA.

For the remainder of the colonial period the Bandung-based PBST was the sole union for Indonesian railway workers.

Although they had reluctantly supported the PBKI, Hatta and Sjahrir were uncomfortable with the use of the language of passive resistance and with the PBKI comparing its campaign to earlier opposition to the Wild Schools Ordinance. Writing shortly after the arrest of Sukarno on 1 August, Hatta argued that opposition to the Wild Schools Ordinance was a spiritual matter whereas the PBKI campaign was a political matter, "Passive resistance is good in the right place, but don't make use of empty slogans, because they can easily come back to bite us." In opposing NIS under the banner of passive resistance, the PBKI had played into the hands of the colonial government:

> Engaging in 'passive resistance', with no thought to how it would begin or end, provided the government with an excuse to undertake an all-out offensive against an entire movement, which seemed radical and revolutionary, in the same way as it destroyed the PKI movement in 1926 and 1927.

Indonesians must not give up hope but must continue the national struggle, even though the path of action was now narrower. Now more than ever he was convinced that political and labour union activity had to be measured and built on strong foundations:

> Playing with 'passive resistance' at a time when danger threatens, gives the appearance of nothing other than loud noise or cheap comedy, that is it is showing off to outside.
>
> Radicalism and revolutionariness is a movement which does not happen through loud applause from outside or through resounding slogans, rather through spiritual power and enthusiasm, strength of leadership, harmony and singlemindedness, lack of fear and not trembling in the face of a painful life and a difficult struggle.[119]

The PBKI was crushed because it was seen by both NIS and the government as a labour union directly controlled by a radical political party, PNI Baru. While there was much leadership overlap at the branch level, with Semarang PNI Baru people in particular dominant, nevertheless the PBKI was a labour union, not a hybrid union/political party like the SBKI in the late 1920s. It was not engaged in illegal activity, none of its leaders had been arrested for breaches of the press laws and there had been no threats of violence or strikes. But it was expanding from its private railway base into the major State Railways towns in East and West Java, and leadership for

[119] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 23 August 1933.

the expansion was primarily coming from PNI Baru and Partindo branch activists. The colonial government feared that the PBKI was too close to PNI Baru and Partindo and might become a Java-wide union under the control of people it regarded as radical political activists. This raised the spectre of another VSTP, which had been controlled by the communists. The colonial government was not prepared to take any chances at a time when it was under criticism from so many quarters and when it was struggling to deal with the impact of the Depression.

When the SKBI was banned in 1929 Indonesian political and labour union leaders had few regrets. The ban on the PBKI was different. There were differences of opinion on strategy and tactics, and many leading political and union figures had serious doubts about the 'passive resistance' campaign, but the PBKI was seen as a legitimate union within the labour movement. PBKI speakers were often less restrained at public meetings, and its publications and propaganda used more confrontational and Marxist language than those of most unions, but its actual activities on the ground were little different. Indonesian labour union leaders were not antagonistic towards the PBKI in the way that they had been towards the SKBI.

The pre-emptive strike by NIS management revealed the weakness of labour unions in colonial Indonesia. The Company was acting within the law, with the full support of the colonial state and its enforcement arms. There was no legal requirement for it to recognise a labour union, whether Indonesian, Eurasian or European. Unions had no legal protection against withdrawal of recognition or discrimination against their members. There was nothing to stop any employer sacking employees who joined a union. Labour unions now had to face the reality that NIS and the government had changed the rules once again. They were forced to find new ways to respond.

Regrouping

The reaction of government and employers in the first half of 1933 was a severe blow to the Indonesian labour movement. Workers were again reminded of the weakness of labour unions and political parties in the face of a determined colonial state. Even before the state's reaction they were fearful of losing their jobs because of the Depression. The anti-union stance of government and employers increased that fear. Labour unions had

worked hard to restore their confidence after the traumas of 1925 to 1927. The colonial state's demonstration of its power, added to the insecurity brought about by the Depression, caused this confidence again to be shaken.[120]

Indonesian labour unions responded to the new restrictions in the only ways they could. Protest meetings, articles in the Indonesian-language press and union magazines, and speeches from sympathetic members of the Volksraad, attacked the government for striking another blow at the right of association. In the Volksraad, PVPN chairman Suroso objected to the assumption that public sector workers would not carry out their duties properly if they were members of a union. He asked whether attending a protest meeting against wage cuts was any longer permitted or was it now expected that workers would "keep their mouths shut" at a wage cut of 30 per cent? He pointed out that it was protest action over the first dismissal of pawnshop workers that had forced pawnshop management to reverse the decision to make many people redundant on grounds of unsuitability. Government workers, he argued, should be fully entitled to be involved in political or labour union activities provided such activities were within the law. Why, he asked, had the government banned PNI Baru and Partindo? Because they advocated "Indonesia Merdeka?": "But where is an Indonesian political movement which does not agree with this?", he asked[121] Suroso's motion opposing a loyalty pledge from government workers who joined a union was, not unexpectedly, resoundingly defeated.

European unions agreed with Suroso. The NIOG spoke of a sword of damocles hanging over the heads of all officials in public sector unions. It would become very difficult for public employees to carry out their union duties under this new, vague requirement:

> … it will be pretty much impossible for a serious civil servant to become a labour union leader. The very nature of the duty of a labour union leader requires being critical of various government measures, even if only through

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[120] The Batavian nationalist and leader of the National Fraction in the Volksraad, Husni Thamrin, wrote to the Dutch socialist J.E. Stokvis in March 1933 lamenting the impossible position that Indonesian nationalists now found themselves in: "Reaction is increasing at the moment. The police are now in charge. There is no right to hold meetings. Meetings are broken up or closed down. Indonesia Merdeka is a prohibited phrase. Imperialism the same. The struggle against capitalism likewise. In my opinion, the Attorney-General is engaged in a real terror campaign. We are powerless against it. If the police do not want to abide by the limitations of the law and instead trample all over us, there is nothing we can do about it …." Thamrin to Stovis, 10 March 1933, Stokvis Collection, No. 7–48, IISG.

[121] The speech was printed in *Kareta Api*, September 1933.

> raising the wishes of members as a representative on the Organised Labour Consultative Committee.[122]

The VVO objected that the vagueness of the declaration of loyalty was inconsistent with colonial laws that permitted the right of association for government workers and made it "… impossible to know what is or is not allowed."[123] That, of course, was precisely what the government intended. It was no more moved by the arguments of European unions than it was by those of Indonesian unions.

The mass dismissals and the deepening Depression hung heavy over the pawnshop workers' union Congress in July 1933. It was held shortly after government employees had been banned from membership of Partindo and PNI Baru, and after NIS had banned its workers from membership of the PBKI. Speakers reflected on the parlous condition of the labour movement in Indonesia. A paper prepared for Congress delegates on the union's fighting fund, drew attention to the fact that only 36 per cent of members regularly contributed. What was the difference, it asked, between strikes in Europe and in Indonesia? Its answer was that those in Europe always succeeded whereas those in Indonesia always failed. As a consequence Indonesian workers were demoralised, would no longer listen to union leaders, and no longer wanted to join unions. Even though strikes were banned in the colony, it argued that a strong fighting fund was still essential to protect a union from being weakened by disasters such as the mass dismissals in the pawnshops. Delegates were reminded that the NIOG had been able to support its two arrested leaders because it had a significant fighting fund[124]

Sukiman opened the Congress with a strong attack on the government for its bans on government employees being members of PNI Baru or Partindo. He also attacked the NIS, urging the Indonesian labour movement to support the PBKI:

> The PPPH is a labour union, said the speaker, supporting and providing moral assistance to PBKI action that protects the interests of the labour union. Every labour union is united in the necessity of this, because they all experience class conflict, between 'worker' and 'employer'.[125]

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[122] "Gezagsondermijning. Ambtenaren-aktie aan banden gelegd", *De School*, 7 July 1933.

[123] VVO Declaration of 16 July 1933, in *De School*, 29 September 1933, p. 779–780.

[124] The Pre-Advice to the 20th Congress of the PPPH at Surabaya on the Fighting Fund prepared by Susanto is published in *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 May 1933.

[125] Sukiman's speech was reported in *Doenia Pengadaian*, 25 August 1933.

It was a rousing speech but, in the end, Sukiman was at a loss to suggest what labour unions could do to support the PBKI. Some money was collected to assist individuals dismissed, but the amount raised was small.

A public meeting brought the PPPH Congress to a close. An estimated 800 people heard Sukiman report the decision to change the name of the union from PPPH to PPPB. In keeping with the nationalist sentiment of the time the word Hindia was replaced by the word Bumiputera. He assured his audience, though, that the re-named PPPB would still not become involved with party politics, reminding them of the separate but mutually supportive roles of the political and the labour movements: "In the political movement we demand rights for the whole nation, and in the labour movement we demand rights for the workers."[126]

Hatta was the key speaker at the public meeting held during the Congress. This time, unlike at the PBKI Congress earlier in the year, the PNI Baru chairman was allowed to deliver his speech. However, the police interrupted when he spoke of the adverse impact of capitalism on the welfare of the Indonesian people. The warning was ignored. Hatta went on to reiterate the importance of Indonesian labour unions recruiting both low and high level workers and creating one federation for both public and private sector unions. This was the only way to create a powerful labour movement. The police brought his speech to an abrupt end after he referred to the success of labour unions in the Netherlands that, after recruiting both low and high level workers, used their power politically to gain seats in the Lower House of Parliament.[127]

The PPPB was in poor shape in the middle of 1933. Its membership had declined in the past year from 2,953 to 1,784.[128] Three mass retrenchments, a growing sense among members that the union could not protect them,

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[126] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 August 1933

[127] Hatta's speech was reported in *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 August 1933. In it he stated that "Workers must have labour unions that come together into one federation. Manual workers and white collar workers, those who work with a hoe and those who work with a pen, must unite into one labour union federation, because even the future of white collar workers is now threatened.

In the Netherlands, unity has been achieved between white collar and manual workers. Workers there have moved into the political arena because they are able to take part in the election of the Lower House."

[128] In July 1933 the PPPB secretary reported that in the past year, 273 people had withdrawn from the union, 21 had died, 449 had ceased after being retrenched and 569 were terminated by the union itself because they had not paid their membership dues for more than 6 months. Only 193 new members were added during the year. *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 August 1933.

and internal faction fighting, had all taken a heavy toll. *Doenia Pegadaian* urged members not to become dispirited and to continue to support their union, despite the prohibition on membership of PNI Baru and Partindo.[129] The vulnerability of labour unions to the relentless government repression was again evident in October when Surjopranoto was arrested while attending a PPPB central executive meeting in Yogyakarta. He was editing the third volume of a new encyclopedia, which the government regarded as containing inflammatory entries. All copies were seized before they could be distributed and Surjopranoto was eventually jailed.[130]

The Depression provided the government with the opportunity to reduce the cost of labour permanently. In the pawnshop service, for example, new workers had initially been employed on a temporary basis but confirmed in permanent employment after two or three years of satisfactory service. As permanent workers they gained access to leave and pension entitlements. From June 1933, new workers could be employed on a temporary basis for up to 15 years with assessments every six months. A failed assessment could result in immediate dismissal. Permanent workers were also now subject to an examination every two years. Again failure could result in dismissal. In urging the PVPN to raise the issue in the Volksraad and with the NVV in the Netherlands, the PPPB despaired that pawnshop workers were being treated "… not much differently from a Deli contract labourer tricked by a recruiter."[131] The union protested to pawnshop service management and organised public protest meetings. But all power lay with the government. Pawnshop workers were too worried about their jobs at a time of high unemployment to get involved in protests at the local level where supervisors could easily pick them off. When the fourth mass dismissal of another 700 pawnshop workers was implemented in January 1934 there was little the union could do other than formally object.[132]

In three years the pawnshop service had reduced its workforce from around 6,000 to around 3,500. By the middle of 1934, PPPB membership had fallen away to 1,050. Its financial position deteriorated along with its loss of members. In May 1934, it was forced to sell its newspaper, *Oetoesan Indonesia*, and its printery to the Pakempalan Kawoelo Ngajogjakarto (PKN), an organisation controlled by the princely elite of Yogyakarta. Pro-

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129 "Djanganlah berketjil hati", *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 August 1933.
130 *Doenia Pegadaian*, 25 October 1933.
131 Statement of the central executive of the PPPB in *Pemandangan*, 19 October 1933.
132 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 9 November 1933.

ceeds from the sale were still not enough to cover its debts. Workers at *Oetoesan Indonesia* and the printery were owed about 700 guilders in wages in May, but were only able to be paid 500 guilders. Neither Sukiman nor the PPPB would cover the gap, much to the dismay of the workers' union, which complained that the PPPB was refusing to engage with its own workers' union.[133]

The PPPB had no option but to ride out the Depression and try to sustain its death benefit and other mutual funds as best it could. Its central executive continued to meet with senior management of the pawnshop service to press the interests of members. However, it could no longer afford propaganda trips through the branches, with the result that branch activities fell away and many branches became totally inactive. It did manage to maintain publication of *Doenia Pegadaian*, albeit on a reduced scale, continuing to re-assure members that it was doing as much as it could to protect wages and conditions.

Membership of unions affiliated to the PVPN told the story of the impact of the Depression on public sector unions. At the end of 1931, these unions had 37,720 members. Two years later, at the beginning of 1934, membership had fallen to 30,936, and at the beginning of 1935 to 22, 236.[134] Teachers' unions were the one strong area, though even they lost around one-third of their members by 1936 as teachers were retrenched or retired and not replaced. At the beginning of 1935 two-thirds of the total PVPN membership was in the federation of teacher unions, the PGI. The railway workers' union, the PPST, had hoped that permitting first class Indonesian workers to join would reverse its membership decline. This did not happen, with membership slipping from 1,662 at the beginning of 1933 to 912 at the beginning of 1935. It was a far cry from its membership of 5,500 in 1931.[135] The collapse of the PBKI after the imposition of bans by the private railway companies and the State Railways did not help the PPST. The financial impact was considerable. In 1933 the PPST had an income of 4,750 guilders, well down on its peak years. Worse was to come. The 1934 budget allowed for an income of a mere 2,000 guilders. This forced a sharp reduction in employed staff, cuts in promotional tours and reductions in the size and frequency of *Kareta Api*. From July 1934, it appeared every two months in a reduced format and from mid 1936 to mid 1937 did not appear at all.

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133 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 3 May, 5 May and 1 September 1934.
134 See, PVPN Annual Report for 1934, in *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 27 April 1935.
135 *Java Bode*, 20 May 1931.

Surabaya

The PSSI, the Surabaya federation of private sector unions, had entered 1932 with over 5,000 members in affiliated unions. Two years later it had ceased to exist. Most of its affiliated unions, including the PBKI, joined the Sjahrir-led CPBI in May 1933. Within a few months the PBKI was crushed, and the other unions in the CPBI faded away. By the end of the year there were no more than 500 members in the former PSSI unions. The collapse of the Surabaya-based unions for private sector workers once again showed how difficult it was in the colonial context for 'outsiders' to organise workers. The colonial state's crackdown on Partindo and PNI Baru, including the arrest of Sukarno in August and the arrests of Hatta, Sjahrir and other prominent PNI Baru leaders in February 1934, had the desired effect. PNI Baru and Partindo members were no longer allowed to attend public meetings of unions, and if they remained on the executives of unions police surveillance was even more relentless. Fearful of being arrested or being dismissed from their jobs, many Partindo and PNI Baru members broke with politics and labour unions, at least for the time being.

For three years the Indonesian Study Club/PBI had been relatively successful in organising unions for Surabaya workers. However, as the PBI lost control of the unions it had created to PNI Baru and Partindo people, it withdrew its institutional, financial and professional support. Instead it increased its social and economic activities and began to organise Rukan Tani (farmers' associations) in rural East Java. It did not abandon its interest in organising Surabaya workers, but needed time to work out a new strategy after the collapse of most of the private sector unions it had created.

Sutomo explained his changed views on the organisation of labour unions in advice prepared for the second Indonesia Raya Congress (Greater Indonesia Congress) at the end of December 1933. The Congress was scheduled for the end of a difficult year for the labour movement and at a time when the Depression was reaching new depths. At the last minute, it was banned by the Resident of Surabaya, as a threat to public order, but this did not prevent the circulation of Congress advisory papers to delegates and their publication in the Indonesian press.

As he had done so often before, Sutomo compared the state of the labour movement in Indonesia with that in Europe. The European labour movement, he argued, had been responsible for considerable improvements in workers' wages and conditions. Equally importantly, social laws had been

improved because political parties needed workers' votes. This was in marked contrast to colonial Indonesia, where the labour movement was in its infancy, there were no democratic elections, and social laws lagged far behind those of Europe. He went on to reflect on the reasons it had proved so difficult to organise private sector workers in colonial Indonesia, arguing that because capitalism in Europe was industrial capitalism it was much easier to organise workers who were concentrated in the towns and cities. By contrast, in colonial Indonesia capitalism was largely concentrated in the plantation economy and the sugar industry, making it far more difficult to organise workers. In villages there were great differences between people's wealth and status, no newspapers, a lack of educated people, and strong control by local officials and the police. It was even worse outside Java, where contract labourers from Java as well as foreign labourers were under the tight control of employers.

In this situation, he argued, labour activists must broaden their focus from the towns and cities to include organising farmers. He called on western educated urban youth to sacrifice themselves—"with a cheerful heart"—by going into the villages to assist farmers in their struggle against capitalism. He concluded by reiterating that a strong labour movement outside the political parties was as important as ever. For this reason he called on the PPPKI, the federation of Indonesian political parties, to create a new Labour Institute as "… a body which will educate our youth to be skilfull and prepared to sacrifice themselves for the labour movement, so that they can create labour union groups and then guide and oversee their development."[136]

Nothing came of Sutomo's proposal for the PPPKI to create a National Labour Institute. The PPPKI had been moribund even before the bans on its two major parties, Partindo and PNI Baru. As a result, in April 1934 the PBI decided to go it alone by establishing a Badan Pengawasan Pergerakan Sekerja PBI (PBI Supervising Agency for Labour Unions), under the leadership of long time labour activist Ruslan Wongsokusumo. Open each morning, the advice bureau advertised itself in *Soeara Oemoem*:

> This Advice Bureau is available to give advice to privately employed workers about problems connected with their work and to give advice and support to those who are establishing LABOUR UNIONS.[137]

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[136] Sutomo's pre-advice was published in *Soeara Oemoem*, 9 December 1933.
[137] See, *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 September 1934.

Alongside the Advice Bureau, the PBI created a new labour union federation, initially with only three individual unions—for taxi drivers, for horse-cart drivers and for sugar factory workers—but with the intent of gradually re-engaging more widely with Surabaya workers.[138]

Ruslan Wongsokusomo had been a key union organiser for most of the unions created by the Indonesian Study Club since 1929. In advice prepared for the second PBI Congress at the end of March 1934 he reflected on their failure to survive the Depression years. He attributed this to their inability to engage the interest of workers sufficiently, with the result that members did not feel a strong attachment. In his view, workers joined unions in the hope that they would get support at times of difficulty. They expected strong death benefit funds, invalidity funds, unemployment funds and pension funds, along with other direct benefits. However, union membership fees were so small that, while promises of social security support were made, they often could not be delivered. The fundamental problem, he believed, was that unions were too decentralised, with central executives dependent on branches passing on only a proportion of membership fees. He advocated a new, centralised, model with central executives controlling membership fees. Central executives would then have the financial capacity to plan and control union activities. There should also be a minimum monthly membership fee of one guilder, of which 60 cents should be set aside for centrally managed insurance, invalidity and unemployment funds.[139]

Ruslan's advice and the PBI decision to re-create labour unions in accordance with his model drew scorn from those who saw unions in more Marxist terms. The editor of *Oetoesan Indonesia* stated that Ruslan's prescription only made sense if union members understood that the true function of labour unions was to struggle against employers and capitalism. If they did not understand this, then a union was no more than a kampung mutual benefit society. The model proposed by Ruslan would be ineffective because it assumed that workers were not capable of, or did not wish to be involved in, struggle.[140] Ruslan was reminded that the task of a labour union was to struggle against employers on behalf of workers and that union funds should be used to this end. All the unions created in Surabaya

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138 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 14 June 1934.

139 "Pergerakan Sekerdja", pre-advice by Ruslan Wongsokusumo to the PBI Congress, 29 March-2 April 1934, *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 13 April 1934.

140 "Vakactie", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 9 April 1934 and editorial in *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 20 April 1934.

by Ruslan, it argued, had held out promises of support to workers, which could not be delivered. This was the reason for the collapse of unions he had led. Attempts to re-create the same type of unions would again fail.[141]

PVPN

The crackdown by the government and NIS confirmed Sjahrir in his conviction that the major weakness of the Indonesian labour movement was its internal divisions. In September 1933 he published a lengthy article in the PNI Baru magazine, *Daulat Ra'jat*, in which he continued the argument that he and Hatta had been making for some time, that the struggle was between capital and labour not between workers in different industries, in different cities or of different status. Workers in the public sector and the private sector, high status workers and low status workers must be educated to realise their common interest. They must work together in the struggle against capital and against a colonial state, which supported it. While government repression and the restrictive colonial laws were serious impediments—he described the government and NIS ultimatums as "work or the union … work or starvation"—workers must not lose heart and must continue the struggle. Unions must unite in the CPBI. The CPBI was the only vehicle able to be a powerful advocate for workers because only the CPBI included all workers irrespective of their status or their employer.[142]

This was, in part, a broadside against the PVPN. Since the beginning of the year Sukiman, Hatta and Sjahrir had used the pages of *Oetoesan Indonesia* to criticise Suroso and the PVPN. An article in February stated that the PVPN had gone to sleep and needed to replace its leadership.[143] *Oetoesan Indonesia* enthusiastically supported the CPBI and its vision of becoming a "radical" federation of public and private sector labour unions. Sutomo and Suroso were described as lacking in vision and too cautious in their approach to the organisation of Indonesian workers. The decision of the September Congress of the PVPN to send a delegate to the Netherlands to advocate an end to cuts in government workers' wages resulted in an intensification of the criticism.

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[141] See, "Sambutan tentang Pergerakan Kaum Buruh Indonesia", by 'Proletar', in *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 17 April 1934.

[142] "Boeroeh dimasa ini", *Daulat Ra'jat*, 30 September 1933.

[143] "Selamat tidoer PVPN", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 24 February 1933.

Sukiman and Sjahrir opposed the PVPN decision as a waste of money. Nothing would come of it, they argued, because Colijn, the Minister of Colonies, was indifferent to the impact of wage cuts on Indonesian workers.[144] The PVPN had intended that Suroso would be the delegate, but Suroso had been ill for some months and while he initially agreed to go finally decided that he could not undertake the long journey. He nominated fellow Volksraad member and chairman of the PPPKI, Husni Thamrin, as his replacement. Thamrin accepted and a special PVPN Congress was called for Batavia in late October to determine the messages to be conveyed. Thamrin's decision to go to Europe, instead of attending the Indonesia Raya Congress scheduled for Surabaya at the end of December, was strongly criticised within the PPPKI and by the Indonesian press. He was, after all, chairman of the PPPKI, which was hosting the Congress, and it was argued that it was his duty to attend. Some voices accused him of wanting a pleasure trip to Europe. On the eve of the PVPN conference Thamrin caved in to the pressure. He announced that he had decided to attend the Indonesia Raya Congress rather than go to Europe. Ironically, just days before the Indonesia Raya Congress was due to commence the Resident of Surabaya withdrew permission for it to be held.

Large sections of the Indonesian press now criticised Thamrin for indecisiveness in first agreeing to go to Europe and then cancelling at the last minute because he feared for his political position if he did not attend the Indonesia Raya Congress. *Oetoesan Indonesia* stated that his action proved "… that Thamrin lacks leadership qualities, he is not steadfast."[145] The real target for the more trenchant critics was Suroso and the PVPN. Marto Kusumo, who had taken over from Sukiman and Hatta as editor of *Oetoesan Indonesia*, called for the PVPN to change its ways or be replaced. He argued that the weakness of the PVPN was clear during the attack on the PBKI. Only the CPBI, he claimed somewhat dubiously, had provided strong support. Even during the mass dismissals in the pawnshops and the State Railways the PVPN only issued weak pronouncements. How effective was Suroso in the Volksraad as an advocate for Indonesian workers, he asked? Not at all was his answer. The PVPN needed to be replaced, or at least reorganised under new leadership.[146]

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[144] See, Sjahrir's criticism in "Buruh dimasa ini", *Daulat Ra'jat*, 30 September 1933. See also, *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 4 October 1933.

[145] *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 23 October 1933.

[146] "PVPN harus di kubra di gantikan jang baru", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 23 October 1933.

In a letter to the Dutch social democrat J.E. Stokvis in 1932, Thamrin had described Sutomo as remarkably calm in the face of personal attacks.[147] Suroso had the same calm demeanour. Whatever his private feelings, he did not respond in kind to his critics. He was, though, strongly defended by the PVPN executive. It agreed that the PVPN had not lived up to expectations but pointed out that it had been created just as the Depression hit Indonesia. The weakness of the Indonesian labour movement should be attributed to the Depression not to the PVPN. It was easy to call for a new labour federation to replace the PVPN but why, it asked, would anyone think a new federation could do any better in these difficult times?[148]

Suroso presided over the PVPN Congress at Surabaya from 30 December 1933 to 1 January 1934. Discussion was dominated by the Depression and continued budget cuts. The government had already announced that it required further significant reductions in 1934, which would involve more redundancies and wage cuts. Just before the Congress convened the Organised Labour Consultative Committee considered the latest report of the Salaries Commission and advised the government that it opposed the key proposals. It objected not just to further redundancies and wage cuts but also to the proposed introduction of locally based wage rates for workers on monthly or daily wages. It argued that this would inevitably lead to lower wages and would be unfair on the lowest paid and least secure government workers. It also objected to proposed cuts in annual holiday leave from 14 days to six days and to changes in a number of conditions, such as sick leave and child allowances. Conscious of the impact of the Depression on many urban workers who had lost their jobs, it urged the government to follow the lead of the mother country by introducing a social services fund for permanent workers in both the public and private sectors. Workers should contribute four per cent of wages, which should be matched by employers. The accumulated funds, with interest, would be able to be drawn by workers on ceasing work through retirement or retrenchment. It realised that this would not have any immediate impact but saw it as contributing to a long-term solution for urban unemployment[149]

The government again rejected the advice of the Organised Labour Consultative Committee, confirming the view of many labour unions, both Indonesian and European, that it had been created as a sop to deflect crit-

147 Thamrin to Stokvis, n.d. (August 1932), in Stokvis Collection, No. 7–48, IISG.

148 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 17 November 1933.

149 "Advies van de Commissie voor Georganiseerd Overleg omtrent Ontwerpen-Werkliedenreglement en Maandloonersreglement", *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 December 1933.

icism of budget cuts. The PVPN decided to withdraw from membership. Surprisingly, given its criticism of Suroso and the PVPN as being too cautious, the PPPB opted to remain, arguing that it was better to continue to influence the Committee from the inside because its public reports were to the advantage of Indonesian workers.[150]

The constant criticism of his leadership of the PVPN may have spurred Suroso to an even stronger public stance in February 1934. The latest report of the Salaries Commission retained the race-based wage structure and imposed further cuts in wages and conditions, including reducing the maximum wages payable under tier A. The overal effect was that the wages of higher paid workers had been reduced by an average of 20 per cent since the beginning of the Depression, while those for lower paid workers an average of 35 per cent. In a passionate speech in the Volksraad, Suroso described this as a deliberate attempt to keep Indonesians in their place and as a serious impediment to the development of Indonesian society because it would reduce the opportunity for lower level government workers to educate their children. The lower limit on tier A wages, which covered most Indonesian public sector workers, would force a lower standard of living on them:

> The government's aim of not separating this group from their own [Native] society, will have to be achieved through rigorous reductions; they must hereafter live in the same milieu as distressed farmers and labourers. But the government forgets, that every civil servant, no matter how low the position he occupies, must maintain his dignity and standing, which makes it impossible for him to have the same lifestyle as the mass in the village or kampung. Anybody who understands the nature of relationships in our society must acknowledge this.

He rejected the argument that without considerably higher wages Europeans would not come from the Netherlands to work in the colony. He also rejected the assertion put forward by some European members of the Volksraad that importation of labour from the Netherlands was necessary, not just for the maintenance of Dutch authority in the colony, but also because Indonesians were not capable of the most senior positions.[151] Speaking to a union meeting in Batavia, he objected especially to the Salaries Commis-

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[150] This contrasts with Sukiman's view as expressed in January 1933. Then he had argued that the Organised Labour Consultative Committee was a 'trick' by the government. It would not be able to achieve anything unless both employers and employees were represented on it and it was able to implement decisions. See, "C v G.O. baiklah diretourkan sadja", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 15 January 1933.

[151] The speech was reprinted in *Kareta Api*, January-February, and March 1934.

sion issuing two different cost-of-living baskets, one for Europeans and one for Indonesians. In his view there was little difference in the cost-of-living for Indonesian and European civil servants. The Salaries Commission, he argued, had used the "orang desa" (villagers) as its touchstone for Indonesian wages thereby ignoring the needs of the "priyayi", who had the same costs as Europeans for major items such as housing, school fees, medical fees, and transport.[152]

The more conservative sections of the Dutch-language press continued to support a race-base wages system, ridiculing opposition from the Indonesian labour movement. The argument of *Java Bode* in December 1933 was typical:

> … is it just that the government should maintain a higher salary for Native civil servant who are considered to have a Western lifestyle, than that which would be paid if they did not have a Western orientation? Even from the native side it could be said that it would be better for them to keep to their own standard of living.[153]

This was precisely what the Indonesian labour and political movements found offensive. The Batavian newspaper *Pemandangan* acknowledged that many Indonesians could live more cheaply than Europeans, but insisted that:

> The needs of educated Indonesians with a completely modern way of life are no less than those of Europeans. In fact, compared to those who are European only on paper, their needs are certainly not inferior.

It reiterated the view of labour unions that Indonesians who did the same work as Europeans should be paid the same wages, and assured readers that when Indonesia was finally independent there would no longer be wage differentials based on skin colour.[154]

Eurasians and Chinese

The phrase "European only on paper" was a non-too-subtle reference to Eurasians. Indianisation and the race-based government wages system soured the attitude of many Indonesian nationalists towards Eurasians,

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[152] "Lagi tentang BBL. Semoea Vakbonden menoeluk", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 23 January 1933.

[153] *Java Bode*, 19 December 1933, reprinted in a leading article "Perbeda'an Keperloean" in *Pemandangan*, 20 December 1933.

[154] "Perbeda'an Keperloean", *Pemandangan*, 20 December 1933.

who were frequently portrayed as living a privileged life compared to Indonesians with equivalent skills and qualifications. In 1934, a Semarang newspaper reported the complaints of some Eurasians in that city at having to pay the same price as Europeans to attend a football match (25 cents), whereas Indonesians paid only 15 cents. This was unfair, it argued, because many Eurasians were paid no more than Indonesians. The Surabaya newspaper, *Soeara Oemoem*, responded by reminding its readers that the Indies was a colony not the Netherlands, where there was one price structure and one wage structure for everyone. While it recognised that in the middle of the Depression some Eurasians were as poor as Indonesians, as a group they were paid considerably more than Indonesians. It would welcome a society where everyone paid the same price to attend a football match—and one where race did not determine wages.[155]

The Depression also focussed the attention of Indonesian labour unions on imported workers. There was increased criticism of government and private companies relying on expatriate Europeans for high-level jobs. In their view, these European workers were paid for too much and were being used to restrict opportunities for Indonesians. There was also criticism of the extent of Chinese immigrant labour in the plantations and the mining industry taking jobs away from Indonesians.

A major focus of the PVPN Congress in December 1933 was the issue of 'coolie' labour, more particularly, imported Chinese labourers. It was the centrepiece of advice for the Congress on the difficulty Indonesian labourers with no education had in getting work. It noted that many state and private enterprises had a lot of labourers who were not "bangsa Indonesia". Far too many Chinese labourers were being brought into the country, taking work away from Indonesians at a time when their livelihoods were under great pressure. The Congress adopted a series of resolutions demanding that the government regulate immigration more tightly so that employers could not so easily employ non-Indonesians.[156]

It was not just imported Chinese labour that came under scrutiny. Articles and letters were regularly published in labour union journals critical

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[155] *Soeara Oemoem*, 30 October 1934. See also, a strongly worded article by Surjopranoto, "Indo-Europeanen en Indonesie", in *Pahlawan*, 10 May 1931, in *IPO*, 1931/25, pp. 517–518.

[156] See the report on the PVPN Congress in *Kareta Api*, January-February 1934. See the pre-advice from Suleman the vice-chairman of the Perhimpunan Pegawai Bumiputera Mijnbouw, "Tentang lapang pemboeroehan bagi koeli-koeli bangsa Indonesia jang tidak bersekolah", *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 30 January 1934. The PVPN motions were published in *Pemandangan*, 8 January 1934.

of an economic structure that enabled Chinese-Indonesians to control a large part of the economy. The first Congress of the Nurses' Union, the PKVB, in December 1931, for example, heard its chairman discuss the economy and the impact of the Depression on people's lives. He stated that if one looked at the shopkeepers and the street traders in Solo it was clear that they were not "natives". If the same question was asked of all the major towns in Java, he said, then it was abundantly clear that "... the majority are foreigners, our people are only workers." The loss of freedom, he argued, was connected with the Indonesian people's loss of control over their own house. "Kemerdekaan" (freedom) involved regaining control over the economy. He referred to the cooperative movement in England and spoke glowingly of Robert Owen as the "father of cooperatives". This, he said, was an example for the rest of the world. The Indonesian people must create an economy based on "self-help and self-activity."[157]

Another example is the criticism directed at the federation of teacher unions in 1932 because it contracted a Chinese-Indonesian owned company to construct its new building in Batavia. A labour union, it was argued, should set an example by employing an Indonesian-owned company. Stung into a response, the PGHB replied that it was a decision forced upon it by the Batavia Municipal Council, which was the source of a loan of 90,000 guilders for the building's construction. The Council refused to allow an Indonesian company to sign the construction contract because it had inadequate capital backing. The PGHB therefore let the contract to a Chinese-Indonesian company but the work, it stated, would be sub-contracted to a young Indonesian company. This did not satisfy the critics, who alleged that the Indonesian company was in fact a branch of a Chinese-Indonesian owned building materials company.[158]

Indonesian labour union leaders had great difficulty in incorporating Chinese-Indonesian workers into their narratives. When they did it was invariably in a negative way. Almost all Indonesian unions had a "bangsa Indonesia" clause in their constitutions, disallowing Chinese- and Arab-Indonesian or Eurasian membership. This only changed in the late 1930s, when new unions for private sector workers organised by Gerindo activists were opened to all workers, irrespective of race. There were few unions for

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157 There is a report on the first Congress of the PKVB at Solo, December 1931, in *Soeara PKVB*, January 1932.

158 See the cricism and the response in *Bintang Timoer*, 24, 25 August and 29 August 1932 in *IPO*, 1932/35, pp. 152–153.

Chinese-Indonesian workers—in 1938 only six, with a total of 1,070 members[159]—and there was hardly any interaction between them and Indonesian unions. Indonesian labour unions, like nationalist political parties, were a little closer to Chinese-Indonesian businesses. Chinese-Indonesian owners of cinemas often made their buildings available for public meetings, and the nationalist press and labour union magazines were partially funded by advertisements from Chinese-Indonesian businesses. Chinese-Indonesian businesses also contributed to the night markets in Surabaya and other cities in the 1930s. This reliance on funding from Chinese-Indonesian businesses may have tempered, but did not stop, labour activists' criticism of Chinese-Indonesian dominance of the economy or their demands that importation of Chinese labour cease because it threatened the livelihoods of unskilled Indonesians.

Indonesian and European Cooperation

Indonesian and European labour unions, led by the PVPN and the VVO, continued to join forces in attacking the government over its strategy of responding to the Depression by reducing public expenditure. Aware that some countries had begun to adopt expansionist economic policies, union leaders demanded increased taxes rather than reduced expenditure. In their sights were the foreign-owned oil and plantation industries as well as people on higher incomes. In introducing the draft 1936 Budget in the Volksraad, the government stated that it intended to reduce state expenditure by a further 22.5 million guilders, of which 10 million guilders would be in labour costs. There would be further reductions in the public sector workforce, reductions in overtime payments, new restrictions on the payment of increments within wage scales and slower progression to the top of each scale.

These measures produced some of the required savings but the bulk came from two major structural changes. First, many lower level jobs would be reclassified from permanent employment to monthly or daily wages. People affected were those who earned less than 50 guilders a month, or about two-thirds of the state's Indonesian workforce. It included not just day-wage labourers but also drivers, guards and postmen as well as most pawnshop workers and teachers. Savings of over six million guilders would

[159] See, Indische Verslag 1940.

be achieved through lower wages, reduced leave entitlements, and the removal of eligibility for child allowances, pensions or redundancy entitlements. Second, a regional wage system would be introduced. Lower level workers and workers deemed able to move easily into the private labour market would be removed from the centralised wages system (the BBL). In future they would be paid 'local' rates, defined by local standards and adjusted to local costs of living. The savings were estimated at over three million guilders annually.[160]

The PVPN joined the VVO in marshalling opposition to the proposed changes. They objected to the reclassification of tens of thousands of people as monthly wage workers, to the creation of regionally based wages and to the widening gap between high and low paid workers. Suroso argued that the new wage rates, which ranged from a minimum of 13 guilders and 50 cents to a maximum of 1,800 guilders a month, would increase the gap between low and high paid workers to unacceptable levels. He also argued that regionally based wages was simply a mechanism to reduce the wages of the lower paid workers even further. While the cost-of-living in villages might differ significantly from region to region, government employees, he argued, lived in towns where costs were higher and more uniform. The PVPN believed that if economies had to be made, then the cost should be borne by people earning more than 500 guilders a month, not by the lowest paid workers.[161]

Protests were organised by the PVPN and the VVO, including a co-ordinated day of protest meetings in the major Java cities on 22 December 1935.[162] The government was surprised by the size of the crowds, both Europeans and Indonesians, attending these protest meetings. It was also surprised by the stringent criticism from sympathetic Indonesian and European members of the Volksraad and the sharp attacks not just in the Indonesian press but in sections of the European press as well.[163] Not only

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[160] *Soeara Oemoem*, 11 December 1935. In West Java, for example, regional wage rates quickly dropped to between 15 and 25 per cent below what they had been under the centralised system.

[161] Speech of Suroso in the Volksraad, 10 July 1935, reprinted under the heading "Potongan gadjih pegawai negeri", *Soeara PKVI*, September 1935.

[162] *Het Postblad*, December 1935, pp. 175–178. For an extensive report on a large protest meeting organised by the PVPN, VVO, the Federatie Indonesische Organisaties om Overheidsdienaren (FIOO) and the Centrale van Indische Vakorganisties van Overheidsdienaren (CIVO) at the City Theatre, Batavia, on 7 December see "Aksi terhadap perubahan gadji", *Soeara Oemoem*, 9 December 1935.

[163] See, for example, "Pegawai Bezoldigingsregeling" in *Soeara Oemoem*, 11 December 1935 which argued that not only should there be an additional tax on the oil industry but

did the proposed budget bring the PVPN and the VVO together in protest but it also brought about unprecedented cooperation between European labour union federations. The government would have expected the 'radical' VVO to oppose its proposed changes but opposition also came from the more conservative European labour unions, which hitherto had been muted in their criticism.[164] Like the PVPN, the coalition of European labour union federations wanted no further cuts in public sector wages and for revenue to be increased through higher taxes, especially on the petroleum industry.[165] A brochure arguing the case was widely distributed.[166] In December the government-appointed Organised Labour Consultative Committee added to the pressure by warning of potential unrest among government workers if the proposed reductions were implemented.[167]

Union protests were effective. When the final version of the 1936 Budget was returned to the Volksraad late in 1935 the government conceded some ground by announcing that it would now seek savings of only four million guilders. While it was determined to go ahead with the introduction of a regional wages system and the reclassification of many categories of Indonesian workers as monthly wage earners, it agreed to moderate some of the reductions in wages and conditions and to phase in others. For example, it limited wage reductions for workers moved onto regional wages to five per cent in 1936 and rather than removing the allowance for those compulsory transferred to other towns or cities it reduced the annual allowance from 20 per cent to five per cent.[168]

Union Protests

Unions produced a steady stream of reports showing the unfair burden imposed on lower paid Indonesians by the new wages structure, with its

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that the government should simplify the civil service by removing some of the higher layers and reducing the number of highly paid imported workers.

164 These unions included, Associatie van Vereenigingen van Academici (the association of academic unions), the Katholiek Vakbond (the Catholic labour union federation), the Centrale van Indische Vakvereengingen van Overheidspersoneel (the federation of Indies labour unions for civil servants), the Vereeniging van Inspectie van Politie (the union for police inspectors) and the Algemeen Bond van Politiepersoneel (general police officers union).

165 "Samenwerking der Vakvereenigingen", *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 July 1935, p. 213.

166 Reprinted in *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 July 1935, pp. 199–204.

167 The advice of the Organised Labour Consultative Committee is printed in *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 December 1935, pp. 62–64.

168 See, *Spoorbond's Blad*, 1 January 1936, p. 30.

reclassification of lower level workers to monthly or daily wages and the introduction of regional wages. Two cases illustrate their arguments. In the water and irrigation department, a worker in 1912 was paid a monthly wage in the range 45–80 guilders. Under the new structure he was paid in the range 25–45 guilders. The minimum wage in 1912 had become the maximum wage in 1936.[169] The large number of village teachers was also badly affected. Already poorly paid compared to other teachers, the regional wages system reduced their wages even further. In Central and East Java the reduction was between 20 and 25 per cent. In West Java the reduction was 15 per cent.[170] Lower wages were accompanied by the removal of many allowances, as jobs were reclassified and permanent employment significantly reduced.

In opposing the new BBL, and especially the monthly and regional wage regulations, the federation of teacher unions, Persatuan Guru Indonesia, was speaking for all Indonesians unions when it said that, "With this regulation it is well known that the civil servant has lost all his rights and as a result his status is nothing other than that of the 'monthly labourer'".[171] It was particularly angered by the impact on teachers. The status, education and leadership role of teachers, it argued, necessitated them having a higher standard of living. The new wages structure was reducing them to poverty[172]

Suroso understood that the government intended to continue to lower the wages of public sector workers and eventually to move all Indonesians onto regional wages. This policy, he asserted, would not only lead to greater poverty but, by crippling the future of public employees, make Indonesia even more dependent on imported European workers:

> Civil servants affected by this will live in poverty, and they will be unable to provide a proper education for their children because they will not have enough money. The consequence will be a reduction in the social development of the people and at the same time less competition for European children in the struggle for work. Important and leading positions will remain in the hands of the European population.
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> From our national standpoint such a reduction in salaries will cripple the future of our people.

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169 *Postblad*, May 1936, p. 76.
170 *Postblad*, December 1935, p. 177.
171 *Soeara Oemoem*, 9 December 1935.
172 *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 December 1935.

What, he asked, would public sector workers do in response? In the short-term they would do nothing, but he believed that they would become increasingly embittered towards the government and towards Europeans who were so much better paid.[173]

Suroso suggested alternative solutions to the government's budget dilemma. Taxes on the better paid could be increased, a higher excise tax could be imposed on the oil industry to raise five million guilders a year and the Netherlands could make a much higher contribution to the cost of maintaining the colonial navy. After all, he said, defence of the colony was an imperial interest. If, after doing all of this, there was still a shortfall then the PVPN would not object to a uniform cut in all public employees wages. This would be much fairer than placing the burden on lower level workers alone. The government did eventually impose a higher excise tax on the oil industry, but calls for higher taxes on the better paid and for the Netherlands to accept a greater share of the defence costs were ignored.[174]

Two months later, when the Volkraad discussed the draft 1937 Budget, Suroso along with a number of other Indonesian members went further in their criticism, arguing that the Netherlands should solve the colony's budget problems by paying 25 million guilders in part compensation for the excess profits extracted over more than 200 years. He went on to praise the industrialisation policy of Japan and questioned whether the Indies government's industrialisation policy was designed to promote indigenous industry or to promote industries owned by foreign capital:

> What is the real advantage to the people by the establishment of foreign capital in this country? We see now that the labourers receive starvation wages while the mass products of industries financed by foreign capital force out Native industry.

He was critical of the Netherlands for not permitting the colony to incur debt, arguing that this was not only deepening and extending the Depression but was having a wider adverse impact on its economic development.[175]

The Depression sharpened labour union criticism of the colonial government. Large reductions in government employment occurred at a time

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[173] The speech is printed in *Het Postblad*, May 1936, pp. 74–79.

[174] Even the Vereeniging van Hoogere Ambtenaren, the union for expatriate Europeans, called for increased taxes on the oil industry. See, *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 12 January 1933.

[175] Speech to the Volksraad, 13 July 1936, reprinted in *Het Postblad*, June-July 1936, pp. 92–102.

when private companies were also substantially reducing their labour costs by sacking both skilled and unskilled workers. Tens of thousands of urban workers, from clerks and tradesmen to day-wage labourers and domestic workers, were forced into a precarious life, supported by occasional casual work or by families and charities. Unions saw private employers, government industries and the bureaucracy taking advantage of the Depression to reduce labour costs not just by lowering wages but also by sacking older, more expensive, workers and replacing them with younger, cheaper, ones. They saw workers' aspirations for their children dashed by the sharp reductions in government expenditure on education. They had argued, to no avail, that by sharply reducing public expenditure the government was only deepening the Depression. Instead of reducing public expenditure, they argued that it should be increased and that the government should finance this through a combination of debt and increased taxes on companies and wealthier individuals.

Labour unions saw the impact of unemployment on a daily basis as desperate members sought support from union offices. Most labour unions, both large and small, had created mutual benefit funds as ways of recruiting urban workers by providing a modicum of social security. These mutual benefit funds struggled to cope with the sudden growth of unemployment and the reduction in union income. Unions struggled during the Depression years. The struggle was made worse by a heavy-handed government. Discontent with the three-tier wages system based on race was accompanied by anger at government support for the unemployed also discriminating on racial grounds. Union leaders were scathing of a colonial government which continued to argue that Indonesian social structures would look after the urban unemployed, that rural Java had unlimited absortive capacity, and that there was nothing that the government could or should do. The government, they believed, simply did not understand the profound changes that had taken place in Indonesia and the changed needs and aspirations of its people. Their experience of the Depression and of the colonial government's inertia strengthened their conviction that there must be greater government intervention in the economy, an industrialisation policy based on state capitalism, and stronger social laws to protect workers.

CHAPTER SIX

REBUILDING A LABOUR MOVEMENT

The Netherlands Indies economy began to recover from the Depression in 1936. In large part this reflected the world recovery and the decision by the Netherlands finally to abandon the gold standard. It also reflected significant changes in the colony's economic policies, partly in response to the growing volume of Japanese imported goods but partly also in response to the impact of the Depression. From 1934 the colonial government adopted increasingly interventionist economic policies, the cornerstones of which were import restrictions, export regulations, promotion of local industry and encouragement of foreign capital.[1]

The colony's recovery from the Depression brought better days for labour unions. Although urban unemployment remained high, workers were less concerned about losing their jobs and more open to parting with union fees. The inflation brought about by the devaluation of the Indies guilder in September 1936 made them even more aware of their low wages and more responsive to labour union naratives. In the four years between 1937 and 1940, the last year for which reliable figures are available, membership of Indonesian labour unions increased more than threefold, and membership of European unions increased over fifty per cent. At the end of 1941, on the eve of the Japanese occupation, public sector unions were stronger than they had ever been and unions for private sector workers were showing signs of recovery.

Indianisation

The policy of Indianisation of the public sector continued. The government was determined to press ahead with reducing costs. In the latter half of the 1930s it made it clear that it intended to reduce the number of workers on the top two tiers of the three-tier wage system. As contracts expired many

[1] See, Anne Booth, "Japanese Import Penetration and Dutch Response: Some Aspects of Economic Policy Making in Colonial Indonesia", in Shinya Sugiyama and Milagros C. Guerrero (eds.), *International Commercial Rivalry In Southeast Asia in the Interwar Period* (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asian Studies Monograph 39, 1994), pp. 133–164.

Europeans would be replaced by Indonesians, or local born Europeans, and fewer new people recruited from the Netherlands. Over time, the savings would be considerable, not just from lower salaries but also from reductions in furlough, pension, and other costs associated with moving families to and from the colony. The largest savings would be achieved by reducing the number of workers on tier B wages. Revisions to the central wages regulations in the 1930s continued to reclassify jobs, with the government stating that when Indonesians became the majority in a tier B job, that job would be re-classified to tier A.

Revisions to the central wages regulations in the latter half of the 1930s continued to erode public sector wages and conditions. Wages were adjusted less than inflation, jobs were reclassified downwards, minimum and maximum rates were reduced, the number of years required to reach the top of a scale were increased, monthly wage regulations maintained and a regional wages system introduced which forced many low level Indonesian public sector workers onto even lower wages. Most workers recruited since 1934 were employed on a temporary basis, which was another way of reducing public expenditure because temporary workers were ineligible for pensions and a range of allowances, including child allowances.

Pawnshops, schools, the railways and the post and telegraph service as well as the bureaucracy had expanded rapidly in the first three decades of the twentieth century. With the expansion of the public sector at an end, promotion opportunities for those already employed decreased and fewer new people were recruited. The western-educated Indonesian and Eurasian ideal of secure public sector employment, with a small pension at the end, was fast disappearing. There was a real sense of grievance among many that what they believed would be the fruit of their education was now being taken away from them.

Lower level Indonesian workers were also aggrieved. They believed that they were bearing the brunt of the reductions in public expenditure. Many at the bottom of the public sector wage structure, people on twenty to thirty guilders a month or less, wanted a better life for their children. The cost of school fees, books and uniforms was increasingly beyond their capacity to pay and was a frequent cause of complaint to unions. Even if they could afford the cost of schooling, the contraction in the government education system made it harder for them to find a place for their children in public schools. They were forced to send them to unsubsidised private schools, often of doubtful quality.

The government was the colony's largest employer, and by far the largest employer of graduates from Dutch-language Indonesian schools. Its wage scales set the standard for wages throughout the economy. Labour unions were well aware of this, as were employers who had consistently opposed wage rises for government workers and supported Depression era cuts in wages and conditions. Unions knew that their fight to preserve the wages and conditions of public sector workers would also benefit workers in the private sector. In September 1941, the European railway workers' union, acknowledging that wages for Indonesian workers were too low, laid much of the blame on wages paid by the government to its workforce creating a low baseline for private employers:

> The Native wage scale is not only fixed by the wages paid to labourers by European employers but also by the level of the lowest wages of government workers, the wages of office caretakers, messengers etc. These categories of government workers receive wages that are below a reasonable standard of living, the more so since their needs are in important ways influenced by the Indo-European milieu in which they live and work[2]

In 1939, the government admitted that the changes introduced during the Depression years were permanent. The monthly, daily and hourly wage regulations, and the regional wage structure would not be rescinded. It argued that public sector wages were higher than those in the private sector and continued to be so even after Depression era cuts. Perhaps they were in some cases, though it is impossible to be sure because the available statistics on private sector wages do not enable accurate comparisons. Many jobs were unique to the public sector, though in nursing and teaching, as well as in the lower levels of the railways, the wages and conditions of Indonesians employed by the much smaller private sector were generally lower. Day-wage labourers, who were a large proportion of public sector workers, were certainly no better off than their private sector counterparts. It was also difficult to persuade postal clerks, nurses, teachers or railway workers, to name just a few, that they should meekly accept lower wages because others might be paid even less. Their lived experience was that wages were significantly lower than they had been before the Depression, that inflation was making it even harder to make ends meet, and that it was increasingly difficult to realise their aspirations.

During the Depression years, labour union leaders worried not only about the high levels of urban unemployment but also about the impov-

[2] *Spoorbond's Blad*, 10 September 1941, p. 152.

erishment of many Indonesians who had jobs. They had a strong commitment to improving the conditions of the working poor. The growing numbers of Indonesian members of municipal councils, many of whom were labour activists, constantly drew attention to the plight of day-wage labourers employed by local authorities. In 1937, at the urging of Indonesian members, the Batavia Municipal Council commissioned a survey of the living standards of its workers who earned less than one guilder a day. The result was a comprehensive study of the income and expenditure of a significant group of Batavian day-wage labourers. The picture that emerged was of people struggling to cope with the costs of basic food, shelter and clothing. A high proportion could not afford to send their children to school.[3] The dismal picture of Batavia day-wage labourers was common for day-wage labourers throughout the colony, in both the public and the private sectors.

For the first time since the beginning of the Depression the state budget for 1937 no longer required reductions in the public sector workforce. Workers covered by the central wages regulations were also promised a five per cent wage rise from 1 July 1937 to compensate for the increased cost-of-living since the devaluation of the Indies guilder in September 1936. The government argued that this was adequate compensation. Indonesian and European labour unions argued that it was grossly inadequate, because the cost-of-living increase for workers in the major cities was closer to 13 per cent. Indonesian and European labour union federations responded by establishing a price surveillance committee of their own, chaired by Volksraad member and European union leader Van Lonkhuysen, to collect monthly data on price movements in the major towns and cities in order to bolster their arguments.[4]

Labour unions were openly critical of the government for ignoring their demands to restore some of the losses of the Depression years, and to compensate fully for the increased cost of living. The 1938 review of the central wages regulations, the BBL, gave them some hope that, with the colonial economy recovering, their repeated demands might at last be met. Indonesian and European unions made submissions to the review. Their anger was manifest when once again they were ignored. Union after union de-

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[3] "The Living Conditions of Municipally Employed Coolies in Batavia in 1937" in *The Indonesian Town. Studies in Urban Sociology* (The Hague and Bandung: W. van Hoeve, 1958), pp. 85–224.

[4] *Persatoean Goeroe*, August 1937, p. 62.

nounced the new BBL, arguing that lower paid workers would be even worse off at a time when the cost-of-living was rising. Suroso attacked the government for rejecting all motions passed by the Volksraad concerning lower paid government workers, especially those on monthly and regional wages.[5] It was increasingly clear, he said, that it had no regard for the voices of Indonesians and Europeans in the Volksraad.[6]

Indonesian members of the Volksraad continued to object to the racial criteria that formed the framework for the central wages regulations, regretting that no progress had been made in over a decade of opposition. Suroso co-sponsored an unsuccessful motion for a seven and a half per cent wage rise for lower and middle level workers but only a two and a half per cent wage rise for higher level workers.[7] The cost to the budget, he argued, would be no different from giving a five per cent increase to everyone. It was a symbolic action, reflecting the on-going opposition of Indonesian labour unions to the huge differentials in public sector wages.[8] Suroso also joined Oto Iskandardinata and Wiwoho in an unsuccessful attempt to reinstate schools teachers into the central wages system.[9]

Indonesian unions were not alone in their opposition to the new central wages regulations. European unions were equally concerned at the introduction of a regional wages structure.[10] Indonesian and European unions

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[5] *Soeara Oemoem*, 23 July 1938.

[6] Suroso was so frustrated with the government refusal to listen to his and others' critiques, that he suggested the Volksraad might as well abandon discussion of the issue: "It is now the fourth time that I have participated in debates in the Volksraad about salaries and it again appears to me that such debates have no results. It is therefore better that in the future the Volksraad no longer engages with the government salary policy, in other words no longer hears about the government salary policy, for it is clear that debate in the Volksraad on the issue serves no useful purpose." Quoted in *Soeara Oemoem*, 17 February 1938.

[7] The Volksraad debate is reported in *Persatoean Goeroe*, January 1938, pp. 27–28.

[8] The Indonesian federation of teacher unions also advocated 'tiered' cost-of-living allowances instead of the across the board five per cent provided in July 1937. It wanted 10 per cent for those earning less than 100 guilders a month, with a minimum of two guilders and fifty cents but only 2.5 per cent for those earning over 400 guilders a month. See, *Persatoean Goeroe*, June 1937.

[9] *Soeara Oemoem*, 31 March 1938.

[10] In 1937 the European teachers' union, the NIOG, published the results of a survey of 1,000 members who worked outside Batavia. They were asked to state how much lower their salaries were from what they would have been if the economy measures had not been introduced. The percentage reduction varied from 21 to 81 per cent with a mean of 50.2 per cent. *De School*, 5 April 1937, pp. 26–27.

In 1939 the European railway workers' union, the Spoorbond, illustrated the problem for many Eurasians by comparing the entry levels and salaries for clerks in 1931 with those in 1938. In 1931, a first class clerk could expect a maximum monthly salary of 200 guilders,

were also worried by what they saw as the devaluation of middle school diplomas caused by too many graduates chasing too few jobs. As a result, entry level qualifications for government jobs were being raised, but new workers were being employed as temporary workers on lower wages.[11] In May 1938 a letter to the magazine of the Midpost, the union for middle level post office workers, lamented that the Post Office had begun to recruit assistant clerks with middle school diplomas as temporary workers on a wage of only 40 cents a day. It was accused of taking advantage of the fact that many young people with middle school diplomas were desperate for work. "Has the value of a middle school diploma sunk so low," it asked. It was unfair, it added, because people could not live properly on 40 cents a day.[12]

When in 1938 Suroso spoke about the need to recognise that there was a condition of permanent urban unemployment in the colony, the government could do little else but agree.[13] It acknowledged that while employment in the workplaces and factories had increased considerably since 1935, the level of urban unemployment for both Indonesians and Europeans had not decreased. The sharp reduction in public expenditure had not been compensated by an increase in private investment and jobs. It conceded that despite the growth in employment as a result of the ending of the Depression and the impact of the government's industrialisation policy, the economy was unable to absorb the annual output of western-educated young workers.[14] The 1938 annual report of the Central Committee for the Support of the Unemployed acknowledged that "… the extraordinarily favourable conditions before the Depression, when almost anyone could gain work in this land, will not return."[15] Government and private employers could employ young people with higher qualifications for entry level jobs at lower wages. The government acknowledged that the effect

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whereas in 1938 the maximum had been reduced to only 115 guilders. Worse, the 1938 BBL removed the distinction between a clerk who entered with a lower school diploma and one who entered with a diploma from a middle school. Both now had a monthly starting salary of a mere 30 guilders. "De positie der klerken", *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 May 1937, p. 146.

[11] From 1937, for example, new recruits to the pawnshop service were required to be at least 18 years old and to have completed an HIS diploma. Previously recruits only had to have a diploma from a second class native school. See, *Doenia Pegadaian*, 10 July 1937.

[12] "Noodkreet", *Het Postblad*, April 1938, pp. 120–121.

[13] See, speech by Suroso in *Volksraad Handelingen*, 16 August 1938, pp. 977–979.

[14] *Volksraad Handelingen*, 1938–1939, Subject 1, Department 2, Item 2, p. 5.

[15] *Jaar Verslag van het Centraal Comite voor Steun aan Werkloozen over 1938*, p. 7.

was to devalue the middle school diploma. What it failed to acknowledge was that it was also an effective way of reducing public expenditure.[16]

Public Sector Unions

The Indies government had embarked on a process of reducing public expenditure by cutting wages and conditions at a time when the expectations of many Indonesian urban workers were rapidly increasing. They wanted decent housing, better sanitation, improved kampung infrastructure. They wanted access to western education for their children. They wanted a similar lifestyle to the Eurasians with whom they worked. They wanted greater social security. Many of them read the flourishing Indonesian press, attended political meetings and protest rallies and gathered in union branches to discuss their grievances. There was a greater consciousness of race and resistance to racial discrimination.[17] Newspapers, union magazines, union meetings and public rallies constantly spoke about wage justice, racial equality, declining living standards and the need for social laws to protect workers and their families. The government had clamped down on 'radical' politics in the 1930s but could not extinguish the conversations taking place in workplaces, in kampung, at union meetings, or in the Indonesian press. The impact of the Depression years, together with the state's suppression of political and union dissent, muted workers' voices. Economic recovery gave workers confidence once more to voice their demands.

According to official figures, in 1940 Indonesian labour unions had 82,906 members. 46,661 were members of 18 unions affiliated to the federation of public sector unions, the PVPN, and 36,245 were members of 17 unions outside the federation.[18] When middle level Indonesian workers

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[16] See, PVPN Circular no 199, 14 September 1939 in *Het Postblad*, October 1939, p. 357.

[17] This is illustrated by two articles published by *Soeara Oemoem* in October 1932. One referred to a pawnshop at Malang, East Java, which had a noticeboard in front of a door with the sign "Europeans only." This was described as insulting to Indonesians and completely unacceptable in 1932. The other objected to racial discrimination in public hospitals, citing the case of the Surabaya Municipal Hospital where poor Europeans who paid nothing towards the cost of their treatment were provided with much better food and accommodation than Indonesians in the same financial circumstances. *Soeara Oemeom*, 5 and 6 October 1932.

[18] *Indisch Verslag 1941*, Part 2, Table 173, p. 258. The official report stated that there were 12 unions affiliated with the PVPN, but PVPN documentation shows that it had 18 affiliated unions.

who joined European unions are included, about half of all Indonesian public sector workers were members of labour unions. Far fewer were active members or regularly paid their membership fees, nevertheless all had in some way been touched by union messages.

Many of the unions outside the PVPN were small unions for specific Indonesian occupational groups in the public sector. Some saw themselves as different from, and superior to, the mass of Indonesian public sector workers represented by the PVPN. These included unions for vaccinators, doctors, municipal administrators and academics. Others were small unions outside Java that saw little value in joining a Java-based federation. There were also a few small unions affiliated to the Catholic labour federation or the looser federation of Protestant unions. Two large unions stayed outside the PVPN. One was the assistant teachers' union. The other was the union for Indonesian public officials, the PPBB. Middle and higher level Indonesian officials saw themselves as having a higher status than other public sector workers, though there were times when the PPBB did join forces with the PVPN in pushing for improved wages and conditions.[19] There were also significant unions for Indonesian army and navy personnel, but they were required to stay aloof from civilian unions. Unions for private sector workers were also outside the PVPN. In the middle of 1941 they had nearly 19,000 members.

The PVPN set the industrial agenda for all Indonesian labour unions. It also strongly influenced the agenda of the federation of European labour unions, the VVO. Under Suroso's leadership it continually pressured the government to improve wages and conditions for its own employees and to introduce tighter regulations on private sector employers. Many of its demands were long-standing: abolition of anti-strike laws; establishment of a legal minimum wage; an end to regulations that discriminated between Indonesians and Europeans; better regulation of child labour; and improved social laws such as unemployment and sickness benefits. New demands in the late 1930s included: the right to collective agreements; an eight-hour working day; abolition of the regional wages structure; inclusion

[19] The PPBB was the major union in the Federation of Indonesian Unions for Public Servants (FIOO). This was a much smaller federation than the PVPN and was composed of unions for higher level Indonesian officials and professional groups. It cooperated with the PVPN on some issues, notably opposition to the 1938 BBL, but regarded the PVPN as representing lower status government employees and too openly critical of the government. The PVPN believed that some public sector unions would not join because the federation did not reject the idea of strikes in principle. See, *Vakcentrale Persatoean Vakbonden Pegawai Negerai P.V.P.N. Boekoe Peringatan 1929 – June -1939*, p. 4.

of monthly- and day-wage workers in the central wages regulations; progressive income taxes and tighter controls on the importation of foreign labour. Above all, the PVPN argued that the wages of low level workers were inadequate for a decent life and that wage differentials between low, middle and high level workers were too great. It demanded a more compressed wage structure with substantial increases for the lowest levels[20]

The PVPN opposed what it saw as visionless government policies. Cutting public expenditure on Indonesian education, especially reducing the number of Dutch-language schools, was seen as further evidence of an intent to maintain Indonesia as a low wage and low skills economy. This it refused to accept. It wanted greater expenditure on Indonesian education, an expansion of state capitalism, tariff protection for Indonesian-owned industry, progressive income taxes and higher royalties and taxes on the oil and plantation sectors. It wanted the government to counter the Depression by increasing, not reducing, public expenditure, if necessary through borrowed money, in order to create jobs and strengthen the economy.

In the late 1930s the PVPN became an increasingly assertive voice. Local branches were established in the major cities and the larger towns in Java. Branches had little in the way of formal structures or money but did help to create a sense of solidarity among public sector unions, enabling them to engage with non-affiliated unions, European unions and unions for private sector workers. One of their most important roles was to organise co-ordinated protest meetings.

Non-affiliated public sector unions as well as private sector unions collaborated with local PVPN branches. Local leaders of public and private sector unions knew each other well. They attended each other's meetings, read each other's speeches and shared ideas on strategy and tactics. They were often members of the same political parties or socio-economic organisations. The industrial agenda promoted by the PVPN was an agenda shared by all Indonesian unions.

Public sector unions recovered quickly from the lean Depression years. They had a receptive audience to their claims that government employees

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[20] Report on the PVPN Congress, 28–29 January 1939, in *Persatoean Goeroe*, February 1939, pp. 22–24 and *Soeara Oemoem*, 3 February 1939. Suruso espressed his irritation with the argument made to him by middle class Europeans in Batavia that Indonesians did not understand the meaning of social laws or collective contracts or their responsibilities under them and therefore they were unnecessary. He pointed out that this had not prevented the sugar factories getting illiterate farmers to sign contracts or for contract Javanese labourers to sign with penal sanctions to go to Deli in Sumatra. See, "Hal Sociale Wetgeving", in *Soeara VIPBOW*, February 1939, pp. 10–14.

had suffered disproportionately heavy cuts to wages and conditions during the Depression years and deserved to be treated better in the economic recovery. The chairman of the VVO, reflected the feelings of both European and Indonesian public sector workers when he told a protest meeting in Batavia in May 1937 that, "… civil servants were the victims of the crisis, the government should make sure that they do not become victims of the recovery."[21]

The strategies adopted varied from union to union. A deeper analysis of four of the more prominent is illustrative of public sector unions as a whole. The rapid expansion of the long established railway workers' union and the new union for lower level post office workers, was largely due to their focus on lower level workers. These workers had felt neglected in earlier years. The growth of the Surabaya-based union for nurses and midwives in public hospitals was in part the result of attracting female workers, including providing opportunities for women to exercise leadership in the union. Teachers remained the most strongly unionised group of Indonesian workers and their unions continued to flourish in the late 1930s. While most teacher unions joined the federation of teacher unions, the union for assistant teachers did not. Tensions between teacher unions were indicative of the divisions within the Indonesian workforce that hindered efforts to create a united labour movement.

Railway Workers

In May 1937, Hindromartono was appointed full-time chairman of the railway workers' union, the PPST. It was a brave move for the PPST. It had only 1,300 members, even fewer who were financial, and had only three active branches, in Surabaya, Batavia and Bandung. It was in debt and had been unable to publish its magazine for more than a year. Its earlier appointment of Sastroamidjojo as a full-time chairman had come unstuck when it could no longer pay his salary. But the union executive probably reasoned that membership had declined so far that it was a risk worth taking.

Hindromartono was twenty-nine years old and just one year out from the College of Law in Batavia. While there he had been active in the Indonesian Students' Association (Perhimpunan Pelajar-Pelajar Indonesia). He

[21] Speech by Hegt at a joint protest meeting of the four European and Indonesian labour union federations in Batavia on 12 May 1937 as reported in *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 May 1937.

edited its journal between 1929 and 1933 and was its chairman from 1933 to 1934.[22] Politically aware, it is likely that he was one of the many students from the College of Law who attended PNI, Partindo or PNI Baru political rallies in the capital. However, he seems not to have joined a political party while a student and after graduation joined neither Parindra nor its later more radical rival, Gerindo. Nevertheless, he was in regular contact with Parindra and Gerindo activists in Batavia, many of whom were friends from student days. Hindromartono's views on the development of labour unions and his efforts to create a Labour Party in the late 1930s suggest that he was deeply influenced by Sjahrir. It is unlikely that he ever met him, given that Sjahrir was arrested in February 1934, and subsequently exiled, while Hindromartono was still a student, but it is possible that he heard Sjahrir speak and highly likely that he read Sjahrir's writings on labour unions and politics. Not surprisingly, in December 1945 Hindromartono became an executive member of the Partai Sosialis (Socialist Party) established by Sjahrir.

The growth of the PPST after Hindromartono took over as chairman was spectacular. By the end of 1937, membership had more than doubled and within four years grown to about 12,000 in 78 branches. The union expanded from the State Railways into the private railway networks and the private tramway companies. It moved from penury to an annual income of more than 14,000 guilders, as it became the second largest Indonesian union, eclipsed only by the federation of teacher unions, Persatuan Guru Indonesia.[23] By 1941, about one-third of the Indonesian workforce in the State Railways and the private railway and tramway companies were members of the union.[24]

Most railway workers were poorly paid and many of those employed by the State Railways had seen their jobs reclassified in 1936 to monthly or casual employment. A large number were day-wage labourers. When Hindromartono took over as chairman, there were complaints that the union was controlled by a small group of well-paid first class workers who were out of touch with the overwhelming majority of railway workers. "We are only considered like a stepchild whose interests are not important," argued one railway worker.[25] Hindromartono's strategy was to re-focus the union

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[22] See the biographical sketch in Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*, p. 422.

[23] *Kereta Api*, June 1939 and February 1940 and Congress edition 1941, p. 146.

[24] *Kereta Api*, July-August 1939.

[25] See the article by Sosromanggolo, the editor of *Soeara Fonds*, the magazine for railway and tramway workers' mutual benefit funds, in *Kareta Api*, 15 July 1937. He was

on lower level workers. While the union accepted all Indonesian railway workers as members, Hindromartono stated that it had a special focus as "… a labour union for low level workers …"[26]

Hindromartono was a good organiser. As full-time chairman he embarked on propaganda drives in railway towns throughout Java, reviving moribund branches and creating new ones. The union magazine proudly reported that in 1938 he had visited almost every one of the 42 branches in Java and Southwest Sumatra.[27] The minutes of dozens of these meetings reveal him as a speaker who used simple language to address issues of immediate concern to lower level workers as he promised that the PPST would promote their interests.

One example is a meeting of about 350 workers from the State Railways Manggarai workshops in Batavia in February 1938. Most of those who worked there were temporary workers and many were day-wage labourers. Hindromartono spoke eloquently about the poor conditions for daily and monthly wages earners, with low wages, arbitrary rules on sickness and non-attendance, limited provision for holidays, lack of child allowances and, above all, the failure of wages to keep pace with the increased cost-of-living. He assured them that the PPST was their champion and would fight to improve the plight of those who were paid so badly.[28]

A second example is a meeting at Bondowoso, a small railway town about 200 kilometers from Surabaya, East Java, in July 1938. The PPST Congress had just concluded at the railway junction of Bangil, near Surabaya, and Hindromartono took advantage of being in East Java to tour eight branches in ten days. About 40 people attended the Bondowoso meeting, almost all of whom were workers in the State Railways. It was held in the railway station waiting room, an important sign to workers that the union was recognised by management and was therefore safe to join. Hindromartono assured railway workers that the union was aware of their grievances and would work tirelessly to raise them with State Railways management and the government. Two issues, he told them, were most important. First, were the hours of work. There must be an eight-hour working day, instead of the much longer, and often arbitrary, hours worked.

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critical of the PPST for appointing a lawyer as its chairman. What, he asked, would a lawyer know about a labour union and especially what would he know about the needs of lower paid workers.

[26] *Kereta Api*, November-December 1938.

[27] *Kereta Api*, June 1939.

[28] *Soeara Oemoem*, 9 February 1938.

Extra hours must be paid at overtime rates. He reminded them that it was union pressure that had achieved an eight-hour day for workers in Europe. Second, was their bad wages and the failure of the 1938 BBL to improve their lot, especially those on monthly or daily rates. He assured them that the union would do something about this. He also spoke about railway workers' mutual funds, no doubt aware that many of his listeners would have been members. While he said that he strongly supported these funds he urged workers also to become members of the union because only a union could improve wages and conditions.[29]

Hindromartono was a skilled negotiator with railway managements. He persuaded them that it was in their interests to acknowledge the union as the representative of Indonesian workers, to refrain from putting obstacles in the way of union recruitment, and to meet regularly with its leaders. These negotiating skills, and his ability to present a reasoned face to managements, enabled the union quickly to create a branch network stretching from the big cities to virtually every railway town in Java as well as many in Sumatra. Branches were formed along the Semarang-based NIS network, the heartland of the PBKI before it was crushed, and by March 1940 the PPST had about 2,000 members in the Sister Societies network in Central Java.[30] In August 1938 the Madura Tramway Company recognised the union and a branch was quickly established.[31] In only three years, Hindromartono transformed the PPST from a near bankrupt union for State Railways workers, with a declining membership, into a large industry-wide union, rivalling the earlier VSTP in size and breath of coverage.

The decline of the PBST during the Depression years had caused railway workers to look beyond the union for social security. They created mutual funds independent of the union. The largest was the Jakarta-based mutual fund, Himpunan Antero Lid Tubangan Untuk Fonds (HALTOF), founded by thirteen railway workers at the Depok station of the State Railways, just outside Batavia, on May Day 1936. From 1938 it published the magazine *Sinar Boeroeh Kareta Api*. The one surviving issue reported that in April 1939 the fund had a substantial income of 1,437 guilders from 1,783 members in 36 branches throughout Java. It had a savings funds, an education fund, a retirement fund and an insurance fund for members and their families. In its first three years it had provided support to 65 members or their

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29 *Soeara Oemoem*, 14 July 1938.
30 *Kereta Api*, March 1940.
31 *Kereta Api*, June-July-August 1938.

widows, paying out the large sum of 12,220 guilders. In 1939 its legal adviser was Muhammad Yamin, a young lawyer and Parindra activist who after independence was to become a prominent political figure.[32]

Other occupation groups in the State Railways organised mutual funds across the network. In July 1934, State Railways conductors at Bangil, East Java, created a mutual benefit fund. By 1937 it had 600 members in 38 branches throughout Java, with separate savings, death benefits and unemployment funds. In the four years to mid-1938 it provided 5,400 guilders to support 19 families of conductors who lost their jobs or died.[33] Other mutual funds within the State Railways included ones for tradesmen, for engine drivers and for station workers.[34] There were also a number of credit and consumption cooperatives, most of which seem to have been small enterprises in workshops, stations and railway workers' kampung.[35] The independent mutual benefit funds restricted membership to the better-paid workers. Membership of the HALTOF, for example, was open only to those who had worked in the State Railways for at least ten years. Day-wage labourers and casual workers were specifically excluded.[36] There is no record of similar organisations for the day-wage or casual workers who were the bulk of employees, though they probably availed themselves of the workshop and kampung credit and consumption cooperatives. While they were in the most need, their incomes were irregular and they were less able to spare what little money they had for mutual benefit funds.

The mutual benefit funds were a problem for the PPST. By providing immediate tangible benefits for railway workers they were undermining one of the major attractions of union membership. It was more difficult to persuade a railway worker to pay a monthly membership fee to the PPST when he was already getting many of the immediate benefits from the mutual funds. Despite its emphasis on enrolling lower level workers, the union could not ignore the more skilled and better paid workers who were members of the mutual benefit funds. These were the people who could most afford to join the union. The union also needed their local leadership and networks of influence in workplaces and kampung.

Hindromartono quickly realised that he needed to engage with the mutual benefit funds. In October 1937, the PPST executive organised a meeting

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32 *Sinar Boeroeh Kareta Api*, May 1939 and *Pemandangan*, 14 August 1939.
33 *Soeara Oemoem*, 18 February 1936 and 30 July 1938, *Soeara Boeroeh*, August 1936.
34 *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 March 1936, 3 February and 26 July 1938, 24 and 25 July 1940.
35 *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 January 1938.
36 *Sinar Boeroeh Kareta Api*, May 1939, p. 19.

with the executives of a number of the mutual funds at which Hindromartono urged them to amalgamate with the PPST in order to maximise their power.[37] The outcome was less than Hindromartono hoped. The mutual funds agreed to recognise the PPST as the only union for railway workers, and undertook to encourage members to join, but valued their independence too much to agree to amalgamation. The benefits of amalgamation would be much greater for the PPST than for them. Nevertheless, promotional support provided by the mutual funds was an important gain for the PPST, contributing to its rapid expansion.

Cooperation was not enough for Hindromartono. In 1939 he organised a second meeting with the executives of the mutual funds in order to try to persuade them to require their members to be members of the PPST. In return the PPST would require its members to join one of the mutual funds. He also proposed that the funds of the mutuals and the union be jointly managed. These were steps too far for the mutual funds, but they reiterated that they would continue to promote the union to their members and also agreed to meet the PPST annually with a view to closer cooperation.[38] The PPST continued to woo the railway workers' mutual funds and met with them regularly. The mutual funds remained cautious, with the chairman of the conductors' fund in 1940 accusing the PPST of trying to move surreptitiously onto its territory. He urged workers to stay united in the fund.[39] At the same time the PPST became an agent for the Bumiputera Insurance Company so that it could offer easy access to an established assurance fund as a benefit of union membership. There was the added incentive that the agency provided an income stream of one per cent of premiums.[40]

The PPST met regularly with State Railways management and the pages of a revived magazine ensured that workers were made aware of the issues raised on their behalf. The conversion of temporary workers into permanent employees, an eight-hour day, four rest days a month, improved pensions and child allowances, a review of the fine system and proper cost-of-living adjustments were the major issues on the union agenda.[41] Meetings with the managements of the private railway companies were similarly focused. The agenda for the meeting with the Sister Societies at

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37 There is a report on the meeting in *Kereta Api*, November-December 1937, pp. 7–9.
38 See, *Kereta Api*, January 1939 and March-April 1939.
39 *Soeara Oemoem*, 17 February 1940.
40 *Kereta Api*, June-July-August 1938.
41 See, *Kereta Api*, July-August 1939 and January 1940.

the end of 1940 included race discrimination, improvements in wages and conditions for monthly and weekly wage earners, better pensions, a widows' and orphans' fund as in the State Railways and improved child allowances.[42]

The PPST was quick to support railway workers at times of need. When 600 temporary workers at the Manggarai State Railways workshops in Batavia were dismissed in January 1939, the PPST ensured that they obtained all their legal rights, including two weeks payment in lieu of notice.[43] The PPST regretted that once again lower paid workers were forced to leave their home towns in search of work: "Government, Government, when will low level workers be properly valued by you?"[44] In late 1939 it tried to prevent the closure of the Semarang city tram system by organising public protests in Semarang and a 16,000-signature petition to the Governor-General.[45] Protest meetings, petitions and meetings with the Company, all coordinated by the PPST, failed to prevent the closure. Some 117 workers lost their jobs, of whom 80 were members of the PPST. In a lead article in *Kereta Api*, Hindromartono lamented that 1 March 1940 would be a day to remember in the history of the Indonesian labour movement because it was yet another defeat for workers.[46]

PPST leaders were pleased by the rapid growth of the union but frequently lamented a lack of commitment from members. In February 1939, *Kereta Api* published a story that related a conversation between a monthly wage worker in the State Railways and his wife. The railwayman had worked with the State Railways for 13 years but now earned less than he did when he started. He was paid 22 guilders and 80 cents a month—less if he had been fined. After paying the rent on his house (two and a half guilders), school fees and book costs (three guilders and 30 cents) and miscellaneous expenses (two guilders) he had 15 guilders a month to feed nine people, or less than six cents a day per person. It was a struggle to survive.

In the dialogue between husband and wife, the wife was portrayed as the upholder of decent social and family values in the face of an errant but repentent husband. He acknowledged his responsibility to provide for his family and not to engage in self-indulgent waste. In return, she acknowl-

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42 *Kereta Api*, 5 January 1941.
43 *Kereta Api*, January 1939.
44 *Kereta Api*, February 1939.
45 *Kereta Api*, November 1939.
46 Hindromartono, "Stadstram Semarang djadi di bongkar", *Kereta Api*, April 1940.

edged her responsibility to support him in his union activities, indeed to take his advice on most matters external to the home. The wife was portrayed as saying:

> I believe that a man likes to provide clear and honest explanations to his wife. Because of this, a wife will always accept advice from her husband in matters of culture and tradition, and support her husband in his struggle for economic improvement and matters like that. If he is clear and honest in his explanations, of course a wife will not refuse to be supportive. On the other hand, if the husband asks permission to go to a meeting, but does not go to the meeting place and instead goes to places where there is fighting, gambling and womanising, then this will result in the wife no longer having faith in him. I believe that there are many of our friends who are low level workers and, although their households are experiencing hard times because wages are too low, the husband still gambles, womanises and is wasteful in other ways, so that the household falls apart, both physically and spiritually, and any drive to improve their destiny totally disappears.[47]

The husband, suitable chastised, agreed that railway workers had a responsibility to join the PPST, not to squander their wages and to support its work for just wages and conditions, such as an eight-hour day.

The story was a morality tale, aimed at railway workers who, in the eyes of middle class union leaders, shirked their responsibilites not only to their union but also to their families. It expressed the frustration of union leaders more strongly than usual, but softer variations of the story can be found in the magazines of most labour unions throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In the eyes of union leaders, too many workers remained 'masih bodoh' (still stupid).

The 1939 PPST Congress was held in the Taman Siswa building at Mataram, Central Java. The local organising committee included two conductors, a station assistant and an engine driver, indicative of the union's success in incorporating lower level workers into branch leaderships. Speaking at the Congress reception, Hindromartono rejoiced in the growth of the union but at the same time reminded his audience that there was still much work to be done. About 30,000 Indonesian railway workers were "still asleep" and yet to join the union. Like all central union leaders, Hindromartono wanted workers to understand the history of their union's struggle. In his speech he referred to the Spoorbond, the VSTP, the railway strikes of 1920 and 1923, and the failure of PBKI 'passive resistance' in 1933. All of this was part of the history of the struggles of railway workers,

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47 *Kereta Api*, February 1939.

which they must not forget. It was the heritage upon which the PPST was built.

The PPST had balanced the appointment of an outsider as its full-time chairman with a vice-chairman who was a lifelong railway man. Asmodihardjo was a conductor in the State Railways in Batavia, a director of the mutual fund for conductors, and a prominent member of the Batavia branch of Parindra. He was a frequent speaker at PPST branch meetings and a regular contributor to *Kereta Api*. He had joined the State Railways in 1912 as a station assistant in Bangil, East Java, and later was a conductor based in Bangil and Surabaya before moving to Batavia in 1932.[48] It is quite possible that he had been a member of the VSTP, though the record is silent. Former member or not, in his speeches and writing he frequently reminded railway workers of the successes and failures of the VSTP.

At the 1939 PPST Congress he spoke at length about the VSTP and the causes of the 1923 strikes. Although the strikes had been defeated, he believed that two positive results had come from the failure. First, the government had established an Arbitration Council for railway and tramway workers, with representatives from government, employers and unions. Second, railway workers had learnt that they must not be impetuous. A labour union, he said, must not be involved in politics. The SKBI and the PBKI had both failed because they did not heed this lesson. The PPST had learnt the lesson well and, along with the Spoorbond, was working cooperatively with railway managements to improve the wages and conditions of workers.[49]

Despite constantly stressing its difference from the VSTP, the PPST openly owned its legacy. PPST leaders recognised that they had to gain the support of the many railway workers who still had fond memories of the VSTP. Their message was that a more cautious PPST was just as strongly committed to the struggle for justice for railway workers. In September 1941, Semarang was the venue for what was to be its last Congress before the Japanese occupation. In reporting on the success of the Congress, Asmodihardjo explained to railway workers that Semarang had been chosen "… because Semarang is the city that fights to arouse the spirit of the workers." Moreover:

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[48] See, *Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*, p. 477 and *Soeara Oemoem*, 27 January 1939.

[49] There are detailed reports on the Congress in *Kereta Api*, July-August 1939.

> We are not easily able to forget the spirit of that Congress. On the contrary, we constantly remember it for its strong conviction, as if it wanted a labour union like the former VSTP. Of course, Semarang is the right place for this spirit, because it was the headquarters of the VSTP. When the public meeting in the PPPB building in Mataram in 1939 decided to hold the next Congress in Semarang it did so in the hope that it would greatly increase its membership by many former VSTP members joining.

He rejoiced that the hopes of the PBST had been realised. Since the Congress there had been a growth in members from the NIS and new branches had been formed on the NIS network.[50]

The Congress edition of *Kereta Api* included a photograph of Congress delegates proudly displaying a banner with the slogan "Workers are the backbone of Indonesian society."[51] The work program for the coming year adopted by the Congress summed up PPST demands from railway managements and the colonial government. It included: a minimum daily wage of 50 cents, four paid rest days every 28 days, an eight-hour working day, 12 days annual paid leave, abolition of the fine system, the creation of a disputes resolution body and a pension scheme for those employed by the private railway companies who earned less than 25 guilders a month.[52]

Post, Telephone,Telegraph and Radio Workers

In July 1937 Djoko Said sought again to realise his vision of 1928. He organised a meeting of lower level workers in the canteen of the Bandung Post Office, which agreed to create a new union. Borrowing 50 guilders from a local cooperative society, Djoko Said printed 5,000 flyers urging lower level workers to join the new union and published the first issues of a magazine, *Orgaan PTTR*. Within a month, the Perhimpunan Pegawai Post-Telegraaf, Telefoon, Radiodienst Rendahan (union for low level workers in the post, telegraph, telephone and radio service—PTTR) had enrolled 2,000 members. By the time of its first Congress in July 1938 it had a membership of 5,450 in 62 branches throughout Java and Madura with accumulated funds of more than 3,800 guilders.[53] The post office service employed

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[50] Asmodihardjo, "Pajak tetapi senang, gembira karena insaf berdjoang", *Kereta Api*, 25 January 1942, p. 11.

[51] *Kereta Api*, Congress Edition, 1941, p. 161, *Pemandangan*, 15, 16 and 19 September 1941.

[52] *Kereta Api*, Congress Edition 1941, p. 137.

[53] Speech of Djoko Said at a public meeting of the PTTR Congress in Bandung, 16 July 1938, *Orgaan PTTR,* August 1938, pp. 29–31.

about 15,000 lower level workers, of whom about 5,800 were monthly wage earners or casual workers. Over one-third had joined the new union.[54]

The speed of the growth was remarkable, raising the question of why the PTTR succeeded when earlier attempts in Bandung and Surabaya in the late 1920s and early 1930s had not. Timing was important. In 1937 the colony was emerging from the Depression, workers were feeling less insecure and inflation was again an important issue, particularly for the lower paid, with a sharp rise in the cost of basic items, such as food and clothing, as a result of the devaluation of the Indies guilder. The colonial government responded by paying a five per cent cost-of-living allowance from 1 July 1937 to workers covered by its central wages regulations, but monthly wage earners, casual workers and temporary workers, which included all those employed since 1934, received nothing. Moreover, this cost-of-living allowance did not automatically flow through to lower level workers in the Post Office. Post Office management insisted on completing its own cost-of-living survey before considering any increase. Lower level workers were clearly aggrieved. The head of the General Post Office in Batavia expressed surprise in early August when a meeting of hundreds of lower level workers decided to form a branch of the PTTR and immediately demanded a cost-of-living allowance.[55] Wherever PTTR leaders went, lower level workers responded enthusiastically to their call to join the new union in order to make managements take notice of them.

The atmosphere in the Post Office was also very different in 1937 from the late 1920s and early 1930s. The communist controlled Sarekat Postel and the PKI uprisings were now becoming distant memories for both workers and management. Post Office management was comfortable with Djoko Said and readily agreed to his request for recognition of the PTTR as the representative of lower level workers. Moreover, it agreed that workers' could request the deduction of union fees directly from their wages, as was the case for members of the Midpost and the Postbond.

Timing and the improved atmosphere inside the Post Office were important, but the key to the success of the new union was the ability of Djoko Said to draw on relationships he had built over more than a decade of activity in social and economic organisations in Bandung. In the five years since

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[54] *Orgaan PTTR*, January 1938.

The union was disappointed though that only 20 per cent of its members were those on monthly wages or employed as casuals. See also, "PTTR' in *Vakcentrale Persatoean Vakbonden Pegawai Negeri P.V.P.N. Boekoe Peringatan 1929-June-1939*, pp. 104–107.

[55] *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 10 August 1937, quoted in *Kareta Api*, August 1937, p. 7.

his return to work from illness in 1933, he had chaired a cooperative for Bandung post office workers, led unemployment support organisations, including one for unemployed postal workers, and been active in other socio-economic organisations in Bandung. For many lower level post office workers in Bandung he was a trusted fellow worker committed to improving their lives. He was able to leverage that reputation with post office workers not just in Bandung but also in other towns and cities.

Djoko Said's energy and commitment was crucial to the success of the PTTR. Like the Batavia-based Hindromartono, with whom he was in regular contact, he had strong organisational skills. In 1937 and 1938 he seems to have been constantly on the move, travelling to towns and cities across Java supporting local leaders and addressing meetings to create new branches. He was also largely responsible for the content of the union's monthly magazine.

In developing the PTTR Djoko Said adopted a similar strategy to that of Hindromartono in the railway workers' union. Lower level workers were encouraged to become members of branch executives in order to feel ownership of the union. Mutual benefit funds and a fighting fund were created, literacy courses organised and small libraries established to educate members. Links were made to pre-existing cooperatives, providing a pool of post office workers who could quickly be reached with the union message. PTTR recruitment campaigns emphasised that the union was recognised by Post Office management and was engaged in negotiation, not confrontation, with management. The constant message was that it was safe for workers to join. They need have no fear for their jobs if they became members:

> We have already said that the aims and objectives of the PTTR are no different from those of other labour unions. PTTR leaders have always been prepared to cooperate with the [Post Office] service. Therefore it can no longer be denied that an association as well organised as this, is definitely needed by the [Post Office] service[56]

Like all Indonesian unions the PTTR urged improved social laws, removal of the ban on strikes and the creation of an arbitration system. Its specific demands on Post Office management focussed on improving the position of lower paid workers: better wages; the inclusion of monthly and day wage workers in the central wages system and their access to widows' and orphans' benefits; improved sickness and holiday regulations; child allow-

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[56] Speech of Djoko Said at the reception of the first PTTR Congress held in Bandung, July 1938, *Orgaan PTTR*, August 1938, p. 4.

ances; and better enforcement of the regulations on hours of work, with proper payment for overtime. When the Post Office finally raised wages by five per cent in September 1937, the PTTR was quick to claim a victory. This demonstrated, it said, what union pressure could achieve.[57]

While he was careful to distinguish the PTTR from earlier unions, especially from the Sarekat Postel, in his speeches and writings Djoko Said was another union leader who did not hesitate to draw on the legacy of earlier labour unions as he tried to educate post office workers about the importance of the world-wide labour movement. He constantly emphasised that a separate union for lower level workers was the only way their demands could be brought to the notice of management:

> We must constantly make the effort, in order to be able to stand on our own feet and lead lower level workers ourselves, and because we believe that there will come a time when middle and higher level workers, who have separated themselves from their lower level brothers, will cease to feel different and patronising towards 'workers', when in reality they are no different[58]

The PTTR central executive was determined that the union would remain focussed on the needs of lower level workers, but it was worried that it would be unable to find enough lower level workers able and willing to lead local branches. This threatened to limit growth. It therefore made provision in the union constitution for middle level workers to apply to the central executive for membership. Middle level workers who were willing to contribute their knowledge and skills, and presumably had the right attitude towards lower level workers, would be accepted as members.[59] Few applied, causing the Surabaya branch to propose to the inaugural July 1938 Congress that the word 'Rendahan' [lower] be dropped from the union name as a way of attracting status conscious middle level workers. The proposal was rejected, with many delegates arguing that for the first time management had been forced to focus on the needs of lower level workers.[60]

Djoko Said believed in industry-wide unions. Indeed, his determination to create a union for lower level post office workers was a decision forced upon him by the repeated refusal of the Midpost, the union for middle level post office workers, to open its membership to them. It is not surprising then that the second PTTR Congress in July 1939 did remove the word

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[57] *Orgaan PTTR*, December 1937, pp. 7–9.
[58] *Orgaan PTTR*, September 1937, p. 6.
[59] Ibid.
[60] *Orgaan PTTR*, August 1938, pp. 20–21.

'Rendahan' and opened the union to all post office workers.[61] It was the action of a union confident that it had a strong membership base among lower level workers and could therefore remove a barrier in the minds of middle level workers which might prevent them joining. It was now in direct competition with the Midpost.

Despite its initial concerns, the PTTR did succeed in recruiting lower level workers to fill branch executive positions. The new executive elected by the Blitar branch in November 1939 was typical. The chairman was an assistant cashier at the post office, the vice-chairman an assistant at the telephone service, the secretary/treasurer a telephonist and the assistant treasurer a ledger clerk. Other members of the executive were a driver, another ledger clerk, a postal assistant and two telephonists.[62] One of the strengths of the union was that it engaged ordinary workers in its day-to-day activities. With the exception of branches in the large cities of Surabaya, Semarang and Bandung, branch meetings were often held in the homes of branch executive members. Issues of local concern were debated and became formal proposals for consideration by the annual Congresses. The central executive was careful to ensure that these proposals were properly considered and that branches were made aware of the outcomes.

The Midpost retained the same indifferent, and at times hostile, attitude to the PTTR as it had displayed to earlier unions for lower level post office workers. It was prepared to cooperate with the new union, but insisted that the interests of its members were very different from those of lower level workers represented by the PTTR. It rejected suggestions that the unions might amalgamate. Indeed it introduced a rule forbidding its members from being a member of any other post office union.[63] When the PTTR sought membership of the federation of public sector unions, the Midpost objected, unsuccessfully, to the clause in its constitution, which allowed middle level workers to apply for membership. The middle level worker, it insisted, was its exclusive domain.

Suroso resigned as chairman of the Midpost in 1936, citing pressure of his other responsibilities.[64] While he was was a busy man, with both labour union and Volksraad responsibilities, it was significant that he chose to drop the Midpost. He had a long-standing friendship with Djoko Said, going back

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[61] *Orgaan PTTR*, June 1940, p. 2.
[62] *Orgaan PTTR*, December 1939, p. 14.
[63] *Het Postblad*, May 1938, pp. 177–178.
[64] See, *Pemandangan*, 27 August 1941.

to their joint efforts to create Midpost in Bandung in 1928, and may well have become increasingly unsympathetic to the attitude of Midpost leaders towards lower level postal workers. Certainly, he supported the PTTR against Midpost attacks in the PVPN. His replacement as chairman, Sastrosudirdjo, reflected the patronising views of many middle level postal workers when in 1938 he stated that, "Assistant clerks and clerks who join the PTTR only have the level of education needed for a low level worker."[65]

As late as September 1940, when the PTTR suggested that in the context of the outbreak of war in Europe the PTTR, the Midpost and the Postbond should unite, the Midpost responded that while it agreed in principle, in practice this could not occur in the near future. With the paternalism that constantly irritated lower level workers, it airily stated that the PTTR was inexperienced and did not adequately understand that managers, many of whom were members of the Postbond, cared very little for the interests of middle and lower level workers.[66] The Midpost remained a small independent union. In 1941 it had 1,200 members in 11 branches.[67]

Nurses and Midwives

The PBI had retreated from the Surabaya labour union scene in the second half of 1932, after PNI Baru people had taken control of most of the unions it had created. By the end of 1933 these unions had almost totally disappeared in the wake of government bans on PNI Baru and Partindo. In 1935 the PBI amalgamated with Budi Utomo, the conservative Central Java-based party, to form Parindra. Sutomo was a key leader of the new party, which was based in Surabaya, but was more focussed on developing the Rukun Tani (Peasant's Association) in East Java than on further involvement in urban labour unions. He probably kept a watchful eye on union activities, and his personal relationships with men such as Suroso, Thamrin and Ruslan Wongsokusumo ensured a continuing influence, but labour union activity was never again high on his personal agenda. Sutomo died in May 1938. With his death the Indonesian political and labour movements lost a significant figure, marked by an enormous outpouring of respect from

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[65] Comment by Sastrasudirdjo, chairman of the central executive of the *Midpos*t, in *Het Postblad*, October 1938, p. 362.

[66] *Het Postblad*, September 1940, p. 281.

[67] *Pemandangan*, 27 August 1941. The union was dominated by clerks. The Semarang branch, for example, had a membership of 91 in April 1938, 68 of whom were clerks. *Het Postblad*, April 1938.

social, political and economic leaders of all persuasions. The 50,000 or so people who lined the streets of Surabaya to witness his cortage showed the impact he had made on ordinary Surabayans.

Ruslan Wongsokusumo was an exception to the general retreat of PBI leaders from the labour movement. He continued to be in demand as a speaker on labour issues at PVPN Congresses and at meetings of public and private sector unions alike. He also continued to provide advice to Surabaya workers through the PBI Labour Advice Bureau and remained active in a number of small Surabaya-based unions. He was a frequent contributor on labour issues to Indonesian newspapers and magazines, never deviating from his conviction that labour unions should focus on the social and economic advancement of members.

From the mid 1930s the most significant union led by Ruslan Wongsokusumo was the nurses' and midwives' union. Formed in May 1931 as the Perhimpunan Kaum Verplegers(sters) dan Vroedvrouwen Bumiputera (PKVB) the new union absorbed a number of small local unions to become the dominant union for nurses and midwives in public hospitals. In speeches and publications its leaders created a narrative linking it to past nurses' unions, with which many members and potential members had been involved. At the same time, they stressed its difference from the last of the Java-wide nurses unions, the Sarekat Pegawai Rumah Sakit Indonesia, which under PKI leadership had led nurses into disastrous strikes in 1925. Leaders wanted to remind nurses and midwives of their long involvement in labour unions but also re-assure them that the new union would not lead them into conflict again. It described itself as a union for nurses, not a political party—"union stays union, politics stays politics, social stays social" was one of its slogans[68]—nevertheless a union that was "fanatical" regarding the nation.[69]

Ruslan had been responsible for the formation of the Surabaya branch of the nurses' union in April 1932. At that time the union accepted all public hospital workers as members, though few workers other than nurses and midwives actually joined. Concerned about its slow growth in the context of government austerity measures, in 1933 the union central executive asked Ruslan to advise on its future direction. Ruslan recommended that it strengthen its focus on social and economic activities that directly benefitted members, and on polyclinics and other welfare activities

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[68] Editorial by the new editor, Siswoharsojo, in *Soeara PKVI*, February 1933.

[69] *Soeara PKVI*, April 1934.

that served the urban poor. He was confident that this would lead to steady growth. He also recommended that membership be restricted to nurses and midwives. He would have been aware that nurses and midwives were conscious of their low status and probably thought that allowing unskilled hospital workers to join would reduce the attractiveness of the union to them. He might also have been conscious of the importance of distancing the new union from the earlier communist-led union, which had been open to all hospital workers. The 1934 Congress accepted his advice, changed its name to the PKVI (the more nationalist 'Indonesia' rather than 'Bumiputera') and moved the seat of the central executive from Semarang to Surabaya.[70] In mid-1935 Ruslan became chairman of the central executive, a position he held through to the Japanese occupation. Between 1935 and 1940 the PKVI more than doubled its membership to 2,400, expanded its reach beyond Java and strengthened both its mutual benefit structures and its welfare outreach.[71]

Even though the majority of nurses and all midwives were women, as late as 1940 the majority of union members were still men. However, women were closing the gap. By the late 1930s, annual reports from branches indicate that around one-third of the membership were women.[72] The union made a concerted effort to encourage women to join. Propaganda meetings were held in hospital-operated hostels, where many of the younger female nurses lived, and some branches were created exclusively for midwives.[73] Articles in the union magazine urged women to join and local executive members saw it as a duty to recruit female nurses and midwives.[74]

Female nurses were hesistant to join the union. One factor influencing their hesitancy may have been the high proportion resident in hostels, which were closely monitored by the hospitals. Another factor may have been a reluctance to join branches dominated by men. For women to be comfortable, branches needed a better gender balance where women felt freer to express themselves. Those women who were activists in the nurses' union seem to have realised this, and worked hard to assure their female

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[70] See the speech of Ruslan Wongsokusumo at the PKVI Congress reception, 15 March 1939, where he outlined the history of nurses' and midwives' unions since the creation of the first union in Semarang in 1918. *Soeara PKVI*, April 1939.

[71] *Soeara PKVI*, January 1940.

[72] See, *Soeara PKVI*, February 1940.

[73] *Soeara PKVI*, September 1935.

[74] See, 'Keputerian PKVI", *Soeara PKVI*, June-July 1938.

colleagues that they could participate and that the union was concerned with their needs.

At the end of the colonial period much remained to be done to persuade the majority of female nurses and midwives to join the union. Nevertheless, it was more successful than any other Indonesian union in encouraging women to take on leadership roles. The leadership aspirations of women nurses and midwives were recognised by many branches. As early as January 1932 a speaker at a branch meeting as Pemalang, on the north coast of Central Java, pointed out that while a number of women were present none were on the branch executive and that something should be done about it. Many branches did in fact move quickly to elect women to their executives. On the formation of the Mataram branch, in Central Java, early in 1932, two of the seven executive members were women.[75] In the middle of 1932 four of the eleven members of the Semarang branch executive were women, including a second chairman and a second secretary.[76]

By the mid-1930s women were regularly elected to branch executives, and were members of conference organising committees, branch delegates to annual meetings, speakers at public meetings and contributors to the union magazine. For example, a public meeting coinciding with the union Congress in March 1939, was addressed by Sri Panuran, a senior nurse. She spoke about the importance of the nursing profession, particular the role of women within it. The audience was reminded that it was not so long ago that nursing was seen as a low status occupation not much more than that of a domestic servant. Referring to the inspiration of Kartini for young Indonesian women and the sacrificial work of Florence Nightingale, Sri Panuran went on to speak passionately about the importance of nurses and midwives and their responsibilities in a modern society.[77] However, progress toward gender balance in leadership at the branch level was not matched at the central level. The nurses and midwives union was no different from all other Indonesian unions: the central executive remained a male domain.

Ruslan Wongsokusumo and the union central executive were active in lobbying colonial officials on issues of immediate concern to nurses. Wages were at the top of the agenda when Ruslan had an audience with the Governor-General in May 1938. He presented evidence that nurses' wages

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75 *Soeara PKVB*, February 1932.
76 *Soeara PKVB*, May-June 1932.
77 *Soeara PKVI*, April 1939.

in 1938 were 40–50 per cent lower than they had been in 1925 and that they had deteriorated in comparison with the wages of other government workers.[78] Child allowances, pensions and overtime payments were also raised with the colonial government. As a member of the federation of public sector unions, the nurses' and midwives' union joined in the campaigns and protest meetings throughout the 1930s to improve wages and conditions of all government employees.

Although union representations on wages and conditions were important in assuring nurses and midwives that the union was promoting their interests, much of its success was due to local social and economic activities. Nurses and midwives were badly paid and needed all the mutual support they could get. Branch activities focussed on organising credit unions, insurance funds, cooperative shops and study funds. Many also created social spaces for members, with libraries and cultural and sporting activities. The Semarang branch was one of the larger branches. It set aside ten per cent of its income for its mutual benefit activities. Its study fund made loans to parents of children who had passed the European Lower School or the Dutch-Native School examinations and wanted to continue their education.[79] The Surabaya branch started a credit bank in April 1932. Within a year it had received deposits of over 400 guilders and made loans of over 300 guilders.[80] The interest rates on both savings and loans accounts were considerably better than members could get elsewhere.

The Lawang branch, near Malang in East Java, had 65 members in 1938, with a savings and loans cooperative, a support fund, and a library. The importance of small-scale support to members can be seen from its savings and loans cooperative. In November 1938, 39 of the branch's 65 members had opened savings accounts with total deposits of 66 guilders. Some 23 members had taken out short-term loans, totalling 42 guilders. It operated like hundreds of other kampung credit and loan societies: a safe place for small amounts that could be saved for a little while, and a supplier of equally small loans to tide members over emergencies. The Lawang branch also had a support fund with 53 of its 65 branch members paying a small extra monthly fee to join. By 1938 it had paid out 21 guilders to four members who had stopped work and to one who had moved to another town.[81] To

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78 *Soeara PKVI*, April-May 1938.
79 *Soeara PKVB*, May-June 1932.
80 *Soeara PKVI*, June 1933.
81 *Soeara PKVI*, January 1935.

complement branch mutual support funds, the union central executive created a central death benefit fund and a savings fund which together had an income of 2,500 guilders in 1938.[82]

Just as teachers' unions were concerned about the provision of education to all Indonesians, so the nurses' union was concerned about the provision of health services for all. An advertisement from the PKVI Health Unit in October 1933 stated that it worked in three areas: creating polyclinics, checking children in private schools, and organising district nurses for poorer kampung.[83] The union decided that every branch should create a clinic to provide basic services for those who could not afford health care. Even the smallest branch seems to have established a simple clinic, open a few hours each week, often in the house of a member. The larger branches opened polyclinics, which provided employment for unemployed nurses and supplied health services to large numbers of people who would not otherwise have been able to afford them. Local pharmacies donated medicines and local doctors donated their time to support the work of the nurses and midwives.[84] So impressed was the colony's Director of Health with the union polyclinics that in late 1939 he acceded to its request for hospitals to supply medicines to the clinics at wholesale prices.[85]

The polyclinic opened by the Mataram branch, in Central Java, in December 1932 was typical of the larger clinics established by the nurses' union. The branch raised 1,100 guilders from small donors and organisations to set up the polyclinic. A number of local Indonesian doctors supported the nurses and midwives, but with a monthly running cost of 125 guilders and an income from fees of only 40 guilders, a fund raising committee was an essential part of its on-going operation. The need for basic health care was clear. Open daily between eight in the morning and midday, and again between five and six in the evening, in its first month an average of 20 people a day attended the polyclinic. Those who could afford it paid 25 cents for a consultation but many were treated free of charge.[86] It was a similar story in Batavia, Yogyakarta, Semarang and Surabaya.[87] The opening day of the PKVI polyclinic in Yogyakarta saw 82 children treated.[88] In

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82 *Soeara PKVI*, January and April 1939.
83 *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 October 1933.
84 *Soeara PKVI*, June 1933.
85 *Soeara PKVI*, October 1939.
86 *Soeara PKVI*, February 1933 and April-May 1933.
87 See, *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 4 August 1933, *Soeara PKVI*, June 1933 and January 1935
88 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 4 August 1933.

1934 the PKVI Polyclinic in a Surabaya kampung offered typhoid injections for two and a half cents for those who could not get to the city's hospital.[89] As we have seen, the Surabaya branch of the PKVI had a stall at the Pasar Malam offering health advice and blood pressure checks.[90] Statistics on the Semarang PKVI polyclinic in 1938 show the extensive range of services provided by the polyclinics. In that year it carried out 40,194 consultations, of which 24,085 were for children, 5,556 for pregnant women, 1,370 for vaccinations and 1,356 for house visits.[91]

Teachers' Unions

In February 1937 three members of the central executive of the federation of teacher unions, the PGI, had an audience with the Governor-General. They raised long-standing issues: low wages, especially relative to other groups in the public sector; the transfer of teachers to regional wages; reductions in the education budget and the cut-backs in the number of places available in the Dutch-Native School system. A new concern was the transfer of responsibility for second class Indonesian schools, which were the bulk of schools for Indonesians, from the central government to local and regional governments from 1 January 1937. It believed that the status of teachers, already diminished in the eyes of many, was under greater threat because regional wages and local responsibility would drive teachers' wages even lower.[92]

The transfer of responsibility for second class Indonesian schools to local councils and regional governments had been discussed by the colonial government since the late 1920s. The decision to implement the plans from 1 January 1937 was one more step in the decade long process of reducing central government expenditure. While Batavia undertook to continue to pay the wages of existing teachers, but at the lower regional rates, it would

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89 *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 September 1934.

90 *Soeara Oemoem*, 8 July 1933.

91 *Soeara PKVI*, October 1939.

There was a much smaller union for nurses in hospitals owned by the Protestant Church (Persatoean Verplegers (ster) Kristen). In 1941 it reported a membership of 362 in 19 branches. Activities were similar to those of the union for nurses in public hospitals. In 1937, for example, its Mataram branch had 139 members. It had a library of 350 books (loaned at a charge of one cent per week), operated a laundry, a bank, an unemployement fund and a badminiton club and held twice weekly courses in English and Dutch. See: *Sinar Kristen*, March 1941 and *Soeara PVK*, November-December 1937.

92 There is a report on the audience in *Persatoean Goeroe*, March 1937, pp. 20–21.

pay only 25 per cent of wages of new teachers employed after 1 January 1937.[93] Teachers' considered the 1938 BBL an insult. As Sutopo Adisuputro reminded delegates to the assistant teachers' union, PGB, Congress in November 1938, the government was seriously devaluing education for Indonesians: "People who do not undertake lengthy study, going out to work instead, have a better future than people who continue to study for several years more in order to become a teacher."[94] Teachers were unhappy about their status, their wages and their future at a time when the colony was emerging from the Depression and they perceived other groups of public employees doing better than themselves. Teacher discontent provided fertile ground for the rebuilding of unions.

At the beginning of 1937, unions affiliated to the PGI had only 10,000 members, though this reduced membership in part reflected the withdrawal of the PGB in the middle of 1934. Three years later, at the end of 1939, affiliated unions had grown to around 15,000 members, or about half the number of teachers in public schools.[95] In reviewing its history for the PVPN ten-year commemorative book in 1939, the PGI reminded readers that its objectives had always been not just to improve the wages and conditions of teachers but also to improve the quality and quantity of schools for Indonesians. The PGI, it stated proudly, was "… an important defender of public education."[96] In 1935 it began to argue that its size and the importance of education should entitle it to a nominated seat in the Volksraad. After the decentralisation of responsibility for Indonesian schools, it urged members to nominate for election to municipal councils where they could work to increase spending on education and protect teachers' wages and conditions.[97]

The federation of teacher unions struggled to maintain a semblance of unity among teacher unions. The majority of Indonesian teachers were either assistant teachers or teachers in village schools. Both groups were badly paid and had seen their wages decline further in the 1930s relative to the wages of teachers in the normal schools, link schools and the Dutch-Native schools. Each had its own union—the Volksonderwijzers Bond (union for people's teachers) for village teachers and the Persatuan Guru

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93 See, "Plaatselijke Organisatie", *Tridaja*, February 1937, pp. 17–18.

94 The speech was reported in *Pemandangan*, 16 November 1938.

95 *Persatoean Goeroe*, December 1937, p. 100 and December 1939, p. 222.

96 "Riwajat PGI", in *Vakcentrale Persatoean Vakbonden Pegawai Negeri P.V.P.N. Boekoe Peringatan 1929-June-1939*, p. 27.

97 *Persatoean Goeroe*, December 1937, p. 86.

Bantu (assistant teachers' union) for assistant teachers.[98] Cooperation between the two unions was limited. Assistant teachers wanted to be treated the same as teachers in standard schools. They did not see village teachers as their equals. Village teachers wanted to be treated the same as assistant teachers, objecting to their status at the bottom of the teacher hierarchy.

In December 1938 the secretary of the Volksonderwijzers Bond reflected on the condition of teachers in village schools. He quoted Suroso who had told the Volksraad that "… among Native civil servants none have a fate as bad as teachers." Although all teachers had poor conditions, village teachers, he argued, had suffered the worst. They had no provision for pensions, unemployment or sickness and had seen their monthly wages reduced from between 17.5 and 30 guilders in 1925 to between 10 and 25 guilders now. He lamented that people constantly saw village education as merely teaching people to read and write, believing that it was not difficult to teach in village schools. Education, he said, was the most important issue for Indonesian society, and village schools were the basis of the education system, yet teachers were more and more undervalued: "Teaching is increasingly difficult, the work is hard, educational levels are high, but the rewards are constantly reduced."[99] He called on the government to pay village teachers the same wages as it paid assistant teachers, otherwise, he said, nobody would become a teacher.[100] The government was unmoved. Village education was intended to be inexpensive.

The union for assistant teachers, the PGB, was a worried union in 1937. Its membership has fallen to around 800. As least 1,000 assistant teachers had been made redundant in the past three years, with a further 1,000 placed on unemployment pay, many with over two decades of service.[101] Few were re-employed as teachers. There was a despondent tone to the union's 1938 budget discussion, when it stated that the redundancies had brought great harm to the union: "The situation of the PGB now is like that of a person with an illness which is almost unable to be treated any more

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98 The Volksonderwijzers Bond was earlier called the Persatuan Guru Desa (union for village teachers). It was formed in 1926, in the wake of the first report of the Salaries Commission. The Dutch name was seen as having higher status. See, "Riwajat 15 tahun V.O.B.", *Pemandangan*, 10 April 1941.

99 Quoted in *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 January 1939.

100 The speech of Mudjodo, secretary of the Volksonderwijzers Bond, was published as "Nasib Volksonderwijzers", in *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 and 9 January 1939.

101 "Congres PGB di Solo", speech of the chairman of the PGB, Judawinata, *Pemandangan*, 5 November 1938.

(chronic sickness)."[102] The union had survived the last few years of membership decline by drawing on accumulated funds. Not only was membership low, but nearly a quarter of these were on unemployment pay, therefore paying reduced fees. It hoped that with the Depression receding, and the government no longer imposing redundancies, teachers would once again have the confidence to join the union.

The PGB, along with all other teacher unions, provided a wide range of mutual benefit funds. It had a fighting fund, a capital fund, a crisis support fund and an action fund at the central level while many of its branches organised cooperatives and savings and loans funds.[103] It also established its own schools because many assistant teachers found it difficult to get their children into the limited places available in the public Dutch-Native Schools. It began in a small way with three government subsidised Dutch-Native Schools in 1922, in Bandung (West Java), Solo (Central Java) and Pasuruan (East Java), and by 1939 was operating 33 schools across Java, including 23 Dutch-Native Schools. Of the 33 schools, only five were subsidised. The rest occupied simple rented premises. During the Depression years all offered free tuition for children of union members who lost their jobs.[104]

The PGB did quickly recover from its low point of 800 members in 1937. By 1940 it had 1,753 members in 67 branches. It remained outside the federation of teacher unions and continued to harbour resentment that other teacher unions looked down on assistant teachers. In thanking members for their support at the beginning of 1938, its chairman, Judawinata, who was the head of a continuing school in Batavia, promised that the union would continue to advocate improved wages and an end to the humiliating condition of assistant teachers:

> We work to obtain our rights, which are not extraordinary but ones that we must obtain. We work along a parliamentary path, along a path that does not overstep the limits.
>
> We work day and night. Day and night we prepare lengthy statements in order that the public knows that we are not government workers who merely

[102] *Tridaja*, October 1937.

[103] Most of the branch level funds were small but some were not. For example, the cooperative bank of the PGB branch at Tasikmalaya had assets of 1,909 guilders in December 1939. See, *Tridaja*, March 1940, p. 17.

[104] *Tridaja*, November 1939, pp. 22–23. The schools taught 4,571 students in 1938 and employed 154 teachers.

> accept silently what is given to them, rather we are workers who want to see justice.[105]

The union was particularly offended by the 1938 annual report of the Department of Education, because it placed "guru bantu" (assistant teacher) in a column headed "untrained".[106] In January 1938, the union magazine published a poignant story relating how an assistant teacher felt so humiliated that he advised his children not to follow in his footsteps:

> Sometimes one of my parents asks me: 'How is it that you are still only an assistant teacher? Is it because you are not competent at your work? Are you stupid?' etc. etc. How do I answer, because I feel that I am not like that? I am only able to respond: 'Oh, father (or mother), perhaps it was fate that an assistant teacher, although clever and valued by the people, has no hope for a wage that is sufficient for the necessities of life. You can only pray, that your grandchildren will not become a teacher like me.' 'Oh, it's like that is it', said father, 'What a pity!' Sometimes the children ask the same question. But I only answer, 'You must not think like that. You must study diligently, in order to achieve your potential and perhaps father is still able to find the money. Only, father is old. Don't become a teacher like your father. Try for something higher, less subject to humiliation, etc. than the path that your father has taken....'[107]

May Day was a day for reflection for Indonesian and European labour unions. Articles in union magazines, as well as in the sympathetic daily press, narrated stories of the growth of labour unions in Europe and the significance of May Day as a celebration of the struggle of workers throughout the world to achieve better wages and conditions. On May Day 1938, the PGB informed members of what had been achieved by western labour unions, including minimum wages, social laws and pensions for private sector workers. It acknowledged that Indonesia was very different, but urged members to depend on their own power and strength:

> Therefore our message for 1 May 1938 is: 'Let us take the path that is possible; don't aim for the sky!' But we should also remember the saying: 'Dripping water is able to penetrate rock over time'. ....
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> In connection with Labour Day, all assistant teachers must realise that they alone can make a union more powerful. The story of workers throughout the world bears this out, only workers in Indonesia have yet to be con-

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105 Editorial in *Tridaja*, January 1938, p. 1.
106 *Tridaja*, January 1938, p. 12.
107 *Tridaja*, January 1938, p. 4.

> vinced, because not all have joined a union, preferring to be completely freeloading parasites.[108]

The PGB used all the political venues at its disposal to advance assistant teachers' interests. It regularly briefed sympathetic Indonesian members of the Volksraad, ensuring that its grievances, and those of teachers more generally, were raised in that forum. After responsibility for second class Indonesian schools was moved to local councils, it realised the importance of municipal elections. From 1938 it stood its own candidates for some municipal councils with members urged to vote for people who would protect their interests. Some teachers were elected and did become strong advocates for Indonesian education. The union was also a strong supporter of moves in Batavia in the late 1930s to establish a Labour Party to represent the interests of workers in the municipal councils and the Volksraad.

The PGB, like most Indonesian and European unions in the colony, maintained relations with the Netherlands federation of labour unions, the NVV, and with sympathetic socialist members of the Netherlands Parliament. In April 1939, after the colonial government had repeatedly rebuffed its demands for better pay and improved status, it decided to follow the example of other unions and send its chairman, Judawinata, to the Netherlands to put its case directly to Dutch politicians and the Dutch press. The function in Batavia to farewell Judawinata before he boarded the boat for Europe was full of optimism that the union's case would receive a sympathetic hearing. The cost of sending Judawinata to Europe was beyond the capacity of the union to fund out of general revenue and members were asked to make a special donation of at least five guilders. This was a large sum for an assistant teacher. The willingness of members to contribute indicated a residual faith in the colonial system to deliver justice. Sympathetic socialist members of the Dutch parliament ensured that Judawinata got a meeting with the Minister of Colonies and that the PGB's arguments were aired in the Dutch parliament but there were no real results from the trip other than vague expressions of appreciation for the work of teachers.[109]

Teacher unions continued to demand that schools at all levels should be the responsibility of the central government, not municipal councils, regencies or villages. Only a centrally funded public system, they argued, could ensure continual improvement in the quality of education and its

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[108] *Tridaja*, May 1938, pp. 69–70.
[109] See reports in *Tridaja*, April and November 1939.

extension to all Indonesians. Teachers' frustration at the decline in wages and conditions was clearly evident at the PGB Congress in December 1937. A motion was adopted that if approaches to the Governor-General and the Minister of Colonies were rebuffed the union "… will request that all assistant teachers cease work and move onto a simple pension."[110] The PGB was copying the tactics of the European unions for senior officers in the KPM shipping company. After an eighteen-month dispute over KPM's refusal to enter into a collective agreement, in December 1937 the unions gave the company a further two months to negotiate, otherwise all union members would resign simultaneously. It was a clever way of getting around the anti-strike laws. It succeeded in forcing KPM to negotiate, but only after the government indicated to the company that it wanted a solution to a dispute which threatened to shut down vital inter-island shipping.[111] The PGB threat of mass resignations did not carry the same weight with the government. But in the context of growing frustration among all Indonesian labour unions at the refusal of the government to respond positively to even their most moderate requests, it was a further sign of widespread discontent.

Creating a Narrative

In 1939 the federation of public sector unions, the PVPN, marked its tenth anniversary with a commemorative book celebrating its achievements and expressing optimism for the future. It was a significant milestone for the Indonesian labour movement. None of the earlier labour union federations had lasted anywhere near as long. The book began with an outline of the successes and failures of successive labour union federations, leading to the formation of the PVPN in 1929. It reminded workers of the struggle for justice over more than thirty years. It celebrated that the PVPN had not only survived, despite the ravages of the Depression, but was stronger at the end of the decade than at its formation. Its leaders acknowledged that only some of their goals had been realised, but were convinced that great strides had been made in developing a "union consciousness" among public sector workers:

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[110] *Soeara Oemoem*, 18 January 1938.

[111] There are extensive reports on the KPM dispute in *De Indische Voortsstuwer*, 1937–1938. See also, *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 April and I December 1937, *De Indische Vakbeweging*, 1 June, 1 February, 1 March and 1 April 1938, *Soeara Oemoem*, 3, 13 and 17 January 1938.

> The material results of the work of the PVPN are not yet satisfactory, but its effort to strengthen the spirit of the workers, in order that they will unite and work to defend their interest, has been very productive. Everywhere now there is a belief in the need for a labour union, which hopefully is the birth of a 'labour union tradition', like in England, which will gradually increase the loyalty of members to their union. For this reason, we have not lost heart for the future because the labour movement is not constantly able to move in a forward direction[112]

Member unions contributed short histories, in which they outlined past achievements and future aspirations. Major unions, such as those for pawnshop workers, railway workers, and postal workers, whose members had been involved in the strike waves of the early 1920s, readily owned the successes and failures of those years. They also acknowledged the important role of the Indonesian communist party in organising urban workers, though they stressed that since 1927 unions had adopted less confrontationist policies and had stayed within the constraints imposed by the colonial state.

The commemorative book was just the latest contribution of Indonesian labour union leaders to the on-going effort to create narratives that would engage urban workers. At the reception on the eve of the 1937 PVPN Congress Suroso had again provided a history lesson for delegates. The history of the labour movement mattered to Suroso, as it did to most Indonesian labour activists. He believed that the strength of the labour movement in European countries was due, in part, to workers' owning their heritage, knowing what life had been like before the emergence of unions and understanding that they were part of a long-term struggle. He wanted leaders of PVPN unions to own their history and to see the Indonesian labour movement in the context of international efforts to obtain economic and social justice for workers.[113]

Suroso began by relating how he was constantly asked whether he believed that the Indonesian labour movement would ever become as powerful as labour movements elsewhere. "The reason this question is raised," he said "… is because we feel anxious, anxious because we fear that the older the labour movement here becomes the more it goes backwards." It was a sombre, yet honest, beginning. Suroso knew that many local union leaders had become dispirited during the Depression. Understanding and

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[112] *Vakcentrale Persatoean Vakbonden Pegawai Negeri PVPN. Boekoe Peringatan, 1929 – June 1939*, p. 8.

[113] The speech is published in full in *Soeara PKVI*, January 1938.

sharing their disappointment was an important prelude to assuring them that, while they were living in difficult times, they could take heart from being part of a wider international movement.

He took his audience back to the formation of the first federation of Indonesian labour unions, the PPKB, in 1919. This failed, he said, because its leaders involved the unions in politics. Two competing federations succeeded the PPKB, but the intense bitterness between the two groups again led to failure. Suroso then reminded his audience of the debate in late 1922 as to whether there should be one labour union federation for private as well as public sector workers, with many arguing that the two groups were different because government workers had legally established wages and conditions and private sector workers did not. The decision was to create one federation, the PVH, but to steer clear of politics. In a brief discussion of the failed railway workers' strike of 1923 he again emphasised the consequences of mixing labour union and political activity. As a result of the strike the government cracked down on the PVH. The Indonesian labour movement no longer had a central organisation.

Suroso's narrative then moved to the decision in 1930 to establish the PVPN as a federation exclusively for public sector unions, and the subsequent creation of the PSSI in Surabaya as a federation for private sector unions. Neither federation, he admitted, anticipated the Depression and its dreadful impact on workers. Thousands of members left PVPN unions because they lost their jobs and public sector unions became much weaker. It was even worse in the private sector where unions virtually disappeared. He lamented that since the collapse of the PSSI there had been no significant unions for workers in the private sector, but held out little hope that this would change in the near future. Reflecting the views of many middle class union leaders, he argued that the high level of illiteracy among private sector workers limited their ability to understand the importance of labour unions.

Towards the end of his speech he raised a different issue when he cautioned that labour unions should not only be politically neutral but also neutral towards religion. The growth of Catholic and Protestant labour unions, especially among teachers, railway workers and nurses, worried him, but so too did calls in some quarters for Muslim labour unions.[114] He

[114] The Christian labour unions were quite small, but in the eyes of the secular unions were one more barrier to industry-based unions and one more division in the workplaces that employers could exploit. In 1940, the Catholic Labour Union Federation had 5 member

urged Indonesians to remember the history of their labour movement and not to threaten its unity again by organising workers on the basis of religious beliefs. He pointed to the labour movement in the Netherlands, where unions were based on religion, arguing that it was not as powerful as the labour movements in England, Denmark or Sweden where unions included all workers, irrespective of religious affiliations.

PVPN annual congresses always opened with a major speech from Suroso. One of his major themes in 1939 was the impact of foreign capital on Indonesia and the significant profits repatriated overseas. Foreign companies should be taxed more, he stated, and the government should promote Indonesian-owned industries, particularly state enterprises, so that profits remained in the country.[115] He related how the emergence of a strong labour movement in the Netherlands had led to the introduction of social laws and collective contracts between employers and unions, which had significantly reduced the number of strikes. The Netherlands now had social laws that protected workers, including unemployment funds, maximum hours of work, minimum wages, universal old age pensions, sickness benefits and regulation of child labour. Indonesian workers needed the same protections. The lack of them was a result of the relative weakness of the labour movement.[116]

Suroso's speech was followed by speeches from Ruslan Wongsokusomo, on the need for a legislated minimum wage, and from Atik Suardi, chairman of the federation of teacher unions, on pensions for widows and orphans. Ruslan pointed to recent decisions of the East Java provincial government and the Surabaya Municipal Council to introduce a minimum wage of 20 cents a day for their casual workers as examples that should be followed elsewhere. It was an inadequate minimum, but an improvement on the hourly wages paid by many private and public sector employers. The PVPN, he argued, had a responsibility to promote the interests of the lowest paid workers in the private sector because they were not yet organised.[117] His

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unions: the largest covered workers in Catholic hospitals and schools but there were also small unions for Catholic workers in the railways and the customs service. In 1939 the four major Protestant labour unions, largely for nurses and teachers in Protestant institutions, came together to create a federation. See, *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 February 1939 and 2 April 1940.

115 The pre-advice of Suroso is printed in *Soeara PKVI*, February 1939, pp. 10–13.

116 Ibid.

117 The pre-advice of Ruslan Wongsokusumo is printed in *Soeara PKVI*, February 1939, pp. 7–10.

In a speech in the Volksraad, Suroso spoke about the "starvation wages" of many of the lowest paid workers: "People must not forget that a wage of 20 cents a day for a labourer is

speech was terminated by the police when he described Indonesian workers as slaves, with labourers only having one set of clothers so that when they washed and dried them their bodies were naked and cold.[118] Atik Suardi reminded delegates of the long struggle by unions to get the government to extend the widows and orphans scheme to its Indonesian workers. This success should not blind them to continued discrimination. Both European and Indonesian government employees contributed five per cent of their income to the scheme but whereas Europeans were covered for both widows and orphans, Indonesians were covered for widows only. Moreover, European widows were paid 22.5 per cent of their husband's former wage but Indonesian widows were paid only 18 per cent.[119]

Workers in the Private Sector

Labour unions for public sector workers had organisational bases on which they could rebuild once the economy began to recover from the Depression. It was a different story for workers in the private sector. Unions that survived the Depression were small and had few resources on which to draw. The sharp increase in the cost-of-living flowing from the devaluation of the guilder in September 1936 impacted heavily on workers in the private sector. Public sector workers had some protection in standardised wage rates and unions that could pressure the government. Private sector workers were totally dependent on employers. Some large employers used government wage rises as a guide, but most continued to pay as little as they could get away with, giving only scant regard to inflation. These changed economic circumstances provided an opportunity for activists once again to try to unionise private sector workers.

Parindra had maintained a foothold in labour unions through the worst of the Depression years. Many of its members were active in public sector unions. Parindra also controlled a number of small Surabaya unions and provided an advice bureau for workers in its Surabaya offices. It dominated the political movement after the demise of Partindo and PNI Baru in 1933.

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nothing more than a starvation wage, one that ensures he is able to work. As is well known, the reason wages like this are so low is because it has not been possible to unite labourers into a powerful organisation able to confront employers who are more cunning them them." See, speech printed in *Soeara PKVI*, February 1939, p. 20.

[118] *Soeara Oemoem*, 30 January 1939. A detailed report on the Congress was published in *Persatoean Goeroe*, February 1939.

[119] *Soeara Oemoem*, 10 February 1939.

This came under challenge in May 1937 with the formation in Batavia of Gerakan Rakyat Indonesia (Movement of the Indonesian People—Gerindo) by former Partindo leaders and a new generation of graduates from the College of Law in Batavia. The creation of Gerindo revived the rivalry between Surabaya and Batavia for leadership of the nationalist movement.

Gerindo leaders saw themselves as more radical than those who led Parindra, and in many ways they were. They were impatient with the existing social structures. As members of a generation that came to maturity in the 1930s, their political and economic views were strongly shaped by the Depression. Younger than the central leaders of Parindra they were irked by what they saw as their 'born to rule' mentality. For them, the Parindra stress on 'nation' and 'social harmony' was simply resistance to social change and a determination by old elites to retain power. An independent and democratic Indonesia was not enough. The new Indonesia had to be a socialist society in order to free the country from the grip of foreign capital and reduce social and economic inequalities. Most of the young men and women who led Gerindo would have been at home in the PNI Baru—indeed some had been PNI Baru members. The PNI Baru's Sutan Sjahrir was a major intellectual influence. Not surprisingly, when Sjahrir founded the Partai Sosialis (Socialist Party) after independence many former Gerindo people were attracted to it.

While there were ideological differences between Parindra and Gerindo central leaders, at the local level it was not so clear-cut. Parindra and Gerindo activists competed with each other, but at the same time often worked together, especially in the labour union arena. In Batavia, Bandung, Cilacap and Semarang, Parindra and Gerindo activists worked together to create new unions for workers in the private sector. Even in Surabaya, the headquarters of Parindra, Ruslan Wongsokusomo moved in Gerindo circles at the same time as being on the central executive of Parindra. He was a more cautious advocate of social change than Gerindo activists, and placed a stronger emphasis on the social and economic role of unions, but he too analysed Indonesian society in class terms and had a long history of advocacy for workers.

Former members of PNI Baru were also involved in the renewed effort to organise private sector workers. The bans on PNI Baru and Partindo in July 1933 made their continued involvement with public sector labour unions impossible and involvement in unions for private sector workers difficult. The bans were an important factor contributing to the collapse of private sector unions in 1933. If known PNI Baru or Partindo people at-

tended a labour union public meeting, the police would not allow it to proceed until they left.[120] Those who remained involved restricted themselves to backroom support in order to avoid police attention. By the late 1930s pressure was easing, perhaps because the colony was recovering from the Depression and what had seemed so dangerously subversive in 1933 no longer appeared such a threat. Although periodic arrests continued of PNI Baru people accused of illegal political activities, the police were less rigid about former members' involvement with labour unions.

Brief biographies of three PNI Baru activists who became labour activists in the late 1930s illustrate this. Karta Muhari was a telephonist at the Bandung Post Office and one of the people who worked with Djoko Said to establish the union for lower level postal workers, the PTTR. He was the inaugural PTTR treasurer and in 1939 became a deputy chairman and editor of its magazine. He was also chairman of the local PVPN in Bandung between 1938 and 1942. In the late 1920s he had been a member of the PNI in Cirebon, on the Central Java coast, and later a member of the local PNI Baru branch before moving to Indramayu, in West Java, and becoming a member of the PNI Baru branch in that town. Sukarto was the secretary of the central executive of the union for KPM workers established in Batavia by Hindromartono and Subroto in 1939. He was a former member of the PNI in the late 1920s, serving on the committee that established its Batavia branch and on the editorial board of its magazine *Persatoean Indonesia*. After the dissolution of the PNI he joined the PNI Baru, becoming a member of the editorial board of its major magazine *Daulat Ra'jat* and a member of the editorial boards of two of its local magazines.[121] Mohamad Saad, who in 1941 was chairman of the custom workers' union, secretary of a teachers' union in Jakarta, a member of the executive of the harbour workers' union and a member of the central executive of GASPI, the recently formed federation of private sector labour unions, had also been a PNI Baru member.[122] They, and others like them, provided experienced hands for the task of rebuilding labour unions for workers in the private sector.

Both Gerindo and Partindo had labour union departments that sought to create new unions for workers in the private sector.[123] There was little

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[120] See, "Mededeeelingen aan de Politiek-Politioneele Gezagshebenden", No. 3, 7 November 1938, Secret Mail Report/568, pp. 11–13, NA.

[121] See, entries in *Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*, pp. 453 and 466.

[122] *Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*, p. 461.

[123] The head of the Parindra labour union department was the Batavian lawyer, Samsudin. A graduate of Leiden University, in 1940 Samsudin was an adviser to the nurses'

difference between the unions they created, with all targetting lower level workers. Each new union quickly presented employers with a list of demands, foremost of which was increased wages and improved conditions. They knew that quick action on this front was a key to getting workers' support. The new unions also quickly created mutual benefit funds, such as death, unemployment and sickness funds, cooperatives, and savings and loans groups, in order to provide tangible and immediate support to workers.

In Batavia, Hindromartono and Subroto, both newly elected to the Batavia Municipal Council, were particularly active. Subroto was a veterinarian, chairman of the Batavia branch of Parindra and an executive member of the PVPN. In February 1938 he organised a meeting of workers at the Batavian harbour, Tanjung Priok. Around 120 harbour workers attended and elected Subroto as chairman of a new union. Subroto immediately wrote to harbour employers seeking a wage rise for workers.[124] Within a month the union had recruited 150 harbour workers.[125] Subroto was also chairman of a committee that revived the opium and salt workers' union and chairman of a new union for Indonesian firemen.[126] Hindromartono and Subroto were behind the creation in August 1939 of the Persatuan Sekerja Paketvaart Bumiputera (from December 1940 Persatuan Sekerja Paketvaart Indonesia—PSPI), a union for Indonesian workers at the KPM shipping company.[127] Hindromartono also prepared the constitution and action program for a mutual benefit fund for Batavian harbour workers working for companies other than KPM.[128] A few months later this transformed itself into a labour union, the Sarekat Pelajar Bumiputera (SPB).[129]

The harbour workers' union created by Subroto seems to have been dissolved, with members joining either the PSPI or the SPB. Both unions grew rapidly, establishing branches at ports throughout the archipelago. Ratulangi, a strong supporter of labour unions in his capacity as a member

union, the PKVI, and a member of the Batavia Municipal Council. See, PPO, April-July 1941, in Poeze (ed.), *Politieke-Politioneele Overzichten*, Part 4, 1935–1941.

124 *Soeara Oemoem*, 4 and 17 February 1938. See also, the entry for Subroto in *Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*, p. 199.

125 "Mededeelingen aan de Politiek-Politioneel Gezaghebenden", No. 1, 27 March 1938, Secret Mail Report 1938/377, p. 20, NA.

126 *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 April and 20 June 1938.

127 *Soeara Oemoem*, 3 April 1940.

128 PPO, April-July 1941, in Poeze (ed.), *Politieke-Politioneele Overzichten*, Part 4, 1935–1941.

129 *Soeara Oemoem*, 11 January 1941.

of the Volksraad, was chairman of the SPB. By September 1941, the SPB claimed a financial membership of 3,461, and seems to have been particularly strong in Tanjung Priok.[130] Both unions emphasised that they were open to all workers, irrespective of race, religion or rank. At an SPB public meeting at Tanjung Priok in September 1941, Mohammad Saad, a member of the union executive, told his audience that the union was not at all concerned about the colour of a harbour worker's skin, just that he was a worker: "The worker does not distinguish between skin and colour, because his fundamental problem is that he has to sell his labour in order to eat."[131]

Hindromartono was deputy chairman of both the PSPI and the SPB and had a pivotal role in the development of many of the unions for private sector workers. As a good public speaker, able to convey his ideas in simple language and use stories and allegories to which ordinary workers could relate, he was in constant demand for public meetings and union congresses throughout Java. He repeatedly stressed the importance of unions for private sector workers, illustrating his talks by pointing to the successes of labour movements in Europe. As a full-time union activist, with his salary paid by the railway workers' union, he was able to move around the towns and cities of Java adding speaking engagements with other unions to his visits to PPST branches.

One of the more ambitious of the new unions was the Persatuan Buruh Rendahan Indonesia (union for lower level Indonesian workers—PBRI), formed in Surabaya in October 1938. By mid-1940 the union had branches in Surabaya, Pekalongan and Semarang, and had created a cooperative, a barber shop, and a tailoring shop.[132] There is little information on the prime movers, except that the chairman, Tunggono, had once worked at the Surabaya naval base. The 300 people who attended its inaugural public meeting heard Tunggono say that workers were treated like merchandise by employers, who did whatever they wanted with them and paid them as little as they could get away with. There were many unions in Indonesia, he said, but none that promoted the interests of lower level workers. The new union intended to fill this gap. The presence on the platform of Ruslan Wongsokusumo was an indication that Tunggono was well known to Surabaya labour activists. He may even have been a Parindra member. Ruslan's speech was constantly interrupted by the police, who objected to the

130 *Pemandangan*, 30 September 1941.
131 Ibid.
132 *Soeara Oemoem*, 27 June and 25 July 1940.

language used, such as when he described Indonesian workers as being treated like "horses". The connection between the PBRI and Parindra was underscored in 1941 when Ruslan Wongsokusumo became its second secretary.[133]

The aims of the PBRI embraced the major issues that concerned lower paid workers. It would pressure the government to improve social laws in order to protect lower level workers against employers. It would pressure employers to provide social welfare for workers, such as sickness benefits, severance money and pensions. It would create social security funds for members. It would organise courses on literacy, thrift and other matters that affected workers lives. It would pressure the Surabaya Municipal Council to improve infrastructure in the kampung where lower paid workers lived.[134]

The Bond Indonesische Chauffeurs (union of Indonesian drivers—BIC) was an exception to the general collapse of private sector labour unions in the Depression years. Established in November 1932 in Banjarmasin, Southeast Kalimantan, it was loosely connected to the PBI and later Parindra in Surabaya. Very little is known about it.[135] Only a few copies of its magazine for 1940 are extant. There were no reports of its activities in the monthly surveys by the political intelligence service before that year, an indication that it was seen as benign by the government. There were also few reports on the union in the Indonesian press. It is difficult to guage the strength of BIC. In late 1941 it claimed a membership of 12,000 in 70 branches, 31 of them in Sumatra.[136] This was a considerable exaggeration, probably reflecting the number of people who had bought a union badge. In July 1940 its magazine reported a print run of 3,000, and a financial membership of around 1,300. It had a death benefit fund and other mutual funds and even fielded a football team in a local competition in Medan, North Sumatra. Uniquely among Indonesian labour unions, almost all of its members were in Kalimantan and Sumatra. In the late 1930s Volksraad member, Tadjoodin Noor, a lawyer and advocate in Banjarmasin, was its adviser.[137] It established a branch in Surabaya sometime in the late 1930s but in March 1940

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133 *Pemandangan*, 11 January 1941.

134 "Rapat oemoem PBRI", *Soeara Oemoem*, 20 October 1938. See also, "Makloemat dari PB 'PBRI'", *Pemandangan*, 11 January 1941.

135 There is a sketchy history in "Sedjarah ringkas Bond Indonesische Chauffeur BIC", *Perintis*, 10 December 1940, pp. 12–14.

136 *Pemandangan*, 22 November 1941.

137 *Pemandangan*, 22 November 1941.

this had only 58 financial members. It had an even smaller branch in Madiun, East Java, and held its 1940 Congress in that city in an effort to spread its influence on Java. Djoko Said, the chairman of the PTTR, was reportedly its representative in Bandung, but there is no evidence of a branch in that city.[138]

In January 1939 as part of its push to organise private sector workers, Parindra created a new union for drivers in Surabaya and a union for drivers of horse-drawn buggies in Besuki.[139] The latter quickly attracted 30 drivers who moved around the town flying the Parindra flag in order to advertise the union and the party.[140] In Cilacap it formed a union for labourers at factories, warehouses and the harbour. Its first activity was to send a 22-page dossier outlining the wages and conditions of workers to the Labour Office in Batavia and the Labour Inspectorate in Yogyakarta.[141] The union demanded that the Labour Office investigate Cilacap workers' living conditions and ensure that they were paid properly. Its specific demands included: better wages; laws to force employers to pay workers directly rather than through agents in order to protect wages from being clipped by foremen; accident insurance, because working on the docks and in the warehouses was dangerous; enforcement of an eight-hour working day, with proper payment for overtime; and double pay on Sundays and holidays.[142]

Later in 1938 another drivers' union was established in Cirebon, the Persatuan Sopir Indonesia (Persi) under the leadership of two young lawyers and Gerindo members, Muhammad Jusuf and Suprapto.[143] Suprapto, a graduate of the School of Law in Batavia, was close to Hindromartono, working with him to establish new unions for Batavian workers. He was chairman of a general union for privately employed workers and a union for workers in the petroleum industry. In January 1939, he was cautioned by the police over a front page article in a union magazine which included a quotation from a radical American unionist, Elmer Freytag, who was reported to have said that "Armed troops will not be able to break our

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138 See, *Perintis*, 15 March, 1 April, 1 July and 1 December 1940.

139 *Soeara Oemoem*, 17 January 1939 and 22 December 1938.

140 *Soeara Oemoem*, 22 December 1938.

141 *Soeara Oemoem*, 20 January 1939.

142 Ibid.

143 Jusuf and Suprapto were to become involved in underground activities during the Japanese occupation and together created the new PKI in October 1945. See, Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*, pp. 343–347.

spirit."[144] Jusuf was a graduate from the University of Utrecht who had returned to Indonesia in 1937 to work in a private practice in Cirebon and Bandung.[145] In contrast to the careful public language of Hindromartono, Jusuf was less cautious in his speeches and writings. In September he reportedly told meetings in Cirebon and Tasikmalaja that the proletariat must unite to protect the worth of its labour and that the weapons of the labour movement were the political struggle, strikes, demonstrations, boycotts and passive resistance.[146] Jusuf and Suprapto were supported by the Gerindo organisation in their union work. The Batavia branch of Gerindo organised a Persi meeting at the end of April 1940 where a large crowd of around 900 people heard from Gerindo activists, Amir Sjarifuddin and Adam Malik.[147]

The first Congress of Persi was held in Tasikmalaja, West Java, in December 1940 where Jusuf spoke of the war in Europe and the importance of workers' opposing fascism. Like all labour union leaders, he was opposed to fascism and supported the Allied war effort in Europe. However, the victory of what he called "bourgeois democracy" had to be followed by the victory of "… democracy that is strong, where workers are able to live as full human beings."[148] Other speakers told an audience of 300 that political democracy was not enough and that they must fight also for economic democracy. The Congress resolved to support the creation of a Labour Party, in the words of its vice-chairman Suprapto "… in order to demand a definite program of social laws."[149]

The Congress adopted an action program built on the premise that Persi was a "fighting union". Its demands were similar to those of other labour unions: reductions in working hours, better wages, a regulated industry, prompt payment of wages and improved social laws.[150] Persi quickly became the major union for drivers in Java, claiming a membership of 2,000 by the end of 1940.[151] In keeping with the inclusive ideology of Ger-

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144 PPO, April-July 1941, in Poeze (ed.), *Politieke-Politioneele Overzichten*, Part 4, 1935–1941.

145 *Orang Indonesia Jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*, p. 10.

146 The speech is reported in PPO, August-September 1939, in Poeze (ed.), *Politieke-Politioneele Overzichten*, Part 4, 1935–1941.

147 *Soeara Oemoem*, 9 May 1940.

148 *Soeara Oemoem*, 16 December 1940.

149 The pre-Congress advice was published in *Kereta Api*, 5 January 1941.

150 *Soeara Oemoem*, 16 December 1940.

151 PPO, December 1940-January 1941, in Poeze (ed.), *Politieke-Politioneele Overzichten*, Part 4, 1935–1941

indo, Chinese, Arab and Eurasian drivers were accepted as members.[152] As it grew, its vision broadened to becoming a union for all workers in the transport industry. Relations between BIC and Persi were amicable, with BIC leaders often attending Persi meetings. There was little direct competition because BIC had only a small presence in Java. A fusion between the two unions was agreed in principle but never eventuated.[153] The issue of who would control a fused union was probably a major impediment as was the class language of Persi and its support for the creation of a Labour Party, both of which would have made the Parindra-leaning BIC leaders uncomfortable.

Parindra and Gerindo were not alone in the renewed effort to organise private sector workers in the towns and cities of Java. When Suroso and Surjopranoto created the PVPN late in 1929 they envisaged eventually incorporating private as well as public sector unions. The onset of the Depression put this on hold, but they continued to discuss the ideal of a broad-based labour federation in Indonesia along the lines of the Netherlands Federation of Labour Unions, the English Trade Union Congress or the All India Trade Union Congress. The economic recovery from 1937, and the revival of public sector unions, persuaded PVPN leaders once more to consider how they might engage with workers in the private sector.

The PVPN Congress of December 1937 recognised that the absence of private sector unions was a major impediment to the Indonesian labour movement and resolved that it would become more active in this area.[154] The 1939 Congress decided to organise a Workers' Congress in Surabaya in December 1939, alongside the scheduled PVPN Congress. It was hoped that from this a new labour union federation would emerge to represent all workers and that this day would later be referred to as Labour Day.[155]

The Workers' Congress never eventuated. The PVPN blamed the postponement on the intensification of the war in Europe, but it probably reflected a lack of broad support within the union and political movements at a time when the political focus was on creating an Indonesian parliament.[156] Despite this setback, the PVPN went ahead in February 1941 with the formation of a PVPN Committee for Private Sector Workers (Panitya-PVPN Pegawai Partikulier—known as the P5). Suroso chaired an executive

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[152] *Pemandangan*, 18 October 1941.
[153] *Soeara Oemoem*, 16 December 1940.
[154] *Kereta Api*, November-December 1937, pp. 4–5.
[155] *Soeara Oemoem*, 24 February 1940.
[156] *Kereta Api*, 25 August – 10 September 1941.

that included Atik Suardi from the teacher union federation, Hindromartono from the railway workers' union, Suprapto from the union for drivers and Batavian labour activist and politician Subroto.[157]

The P5 saw itself as providing advice and support to those who wanted to create private sector labour unions, and as a first step towards the creation of a powerful national labour union federation. The P5 was immediately attacked by *Soeara Oemoem*, the Surabaya newspaper closely connected to the Parindra leadership, which accused the PVPN of not being serious, of having no experience of private sector workers and of making promises that could not be delivered. The PVPN, it stated, needed to realise that organising workers in the private sector was much harder than organising public sector workers. If it was serious, the PVPN should stop giving advice and actually do something:

> Private sector workers do not need advice. For a long time they have been looking for leadership, real leadership. What is needed are people who are prepared to organise their unions, not people who merely give advice ....[158]

The strong attack from *Soeara Oemoem* reflected the long-standing Surabaya disdain for activism emanating from Batavia, particularly anything that threatened its own endeavours. The late 1930s saw constant sniping between the Surabaya-based *Soeara Oemoem* and the Batavia-based *Pemandangan*, both of which claimed to be the national newspaper. It also reflected wounded pride. The Surabaya activists had created labour unions for private sector workers in the late 1920s and early 1930s and knew how hard it was to sustain them. They were annoyed that Hindromartono and Subroto, in particular, along with *Pemandangan*, were not giving due respect to their efforts.

In Search of National Bodies

For over two decades the political and labour movements had talked of the need to create overarching national bodies. Ideological, religious and ethnic differences combined with inter-city rivalries and personal animosities to stymie all attempts. In May 1939 yet another attempt was made to create a federation of Indonesian political parties. The Gabungan Politik Indonesia (Indonesian Political Federation—GAPI) brought together the three

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157 *Kereta Api*, 5 February 1941.

158 *Soeara Oemoem*, 4 February 1941. See also, *Soeara Oemoem*, 1 February 1941.

major nationalist parties—the Surabaya-based Parindra, the Batavia-based Gerindo and the Yogyakarta-based PSII—as well as most of the smaller parties. It was driven by Gerindo, but the catalyst was the threat of all-out war in Europe and the fear of Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia. The Netherlands had already rejected the Sutardjo petition which had been passed by the Volksraad in 1936 and which called for a gradual movement towards autonomy within ten years. However, many nationalists, of all political persuasions, were hopeful that the fear of being dragged into a conflict in Europe, and perhaps the Pacific, would persuade the Netherlands to make political concessions in return for Indonesian support of a war effort. A united voice was seen as being more likely to achieve this objective.

The first major activity of GAPI was to organise an Indonesian People's Congress in Batavia at the end of December 1939. It called on all social, political and economic groups to attend as a first step towards the creation of a permanent Indonesian Parliament. This posed a problem for the labour unions. The initial response of the PVPN was that it could not participate in a Congress organised by a political party. It had long argued that labour unions should not be involved in politics and to Suroso the fact that GAPI was the organiser made it a political act.[159] Hindromartono also had reservations, arising from his conviction that any labour union engagement with a political party must be on a basis of strict equality. He was wary of the labour movement being subservient to, or, worse, absorbed into, the political movement. Reluctant to give GAPI too much credit, he pointed out that the creation of an Indonesian parliament had been an aim of the first labour union federation, the PPKB, in 1920 and had been on the agenda of the labour movement ever since. Ultimately, the PVPN did participate, with Hindromartono as one of its delegates, after an agreement with GAPI that the Congress was only a preliminary body, with no decision-making powers and that participation did not entail any further commitment from the PVPN. The nature of a permanent body would be left to a working party on which the PVPN would have representation.[160]

The demand by GAPI, and by the Indonesian People's Congress, for political reform was rejected out of hand by both the Indies and the Neth-

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[159] See, "Makloemat Vakcentrale PVPN", *Pemandangan*, 28 November 1939. See also, responses to this proclamation in *Pemandangan*, 29 and 30 November 1939.

[160] See, *Kereta Api*, November 1939. The Indonesian People's Congress was reported extensively in the Indonesian press. See, for example, *Soeara Oemoem*, 27 and 28 December 1939.

erlands governments. They consistently refused to contemplate even the most moderate requests for political reform throughout the 1930s, let alone to engage in discussions with political or union leaders. The outbreak of war, the occupation of the Netherlands and the threat from Japan did not persuade them to give any ground to nationalists. The Netherlands hoped to remain neutral in the European conflict, as it had throughout the 1914–1918 conflagration. The German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940 showed the futility of neutrality, but did not change the complacency of the Netherlands government-in-exile in London towards events in the Pacific.[161]

The creation of GAPI as a federation of the major political parties, however weak it proved in practice, stimulated labour activists once again to try to create greater unity within the labour movement. Labour activists in Semarang moved first. In December 1940 a committee was formed on the intiative of S.K. Trimurti, the secretary of the Semarang branch of Gerindo, and Kadarisman, a former Partindo member and now a member of Gerindo.[162] It aimed to create a federation of local unions for private sector workers. Early in 1941 it became the Federation of Indonesian Private Sector Unions (Gabungan Sarikat Sekerja Particulier Indonesia—GASPI). Trimurti and Kadarisman were joined in the leadership group by a returned Digul exile and former VSTP member, Muhamad Ali.[163] In May, Hindromartono published an open letter in the Batavian press calling on all private sector unions in the capital to follow the example of Semarang.[164]

GASPI in Semarang does not seem to have been very active. Nor did Hindromartono make much headway in Batavia. The situation changed in July because the PVPN realised that there was an opportunity to advance its vision of becoming the national federation of all labour unions, both public and private. Sursoso convened a meeting in Semarang of 31 private

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[161] For a comprehensive discussion of Dutch policies towards the nationalists in the late 1930s see Susan Abeyasekere, *One Hand Clapping: Indonesian Nationalists and the Dutch 1939–1942*.

[162] Trimurti graduated from the women's teacher training college at Pekalongan in 1930. After teaching for a while in schools in Solo, Central Java, and Banjumas, West Java, in the late 1930s she was a well-known journalist, including being editor of the Semarang daily *Sinar Selatan* and the weekly *Soeloeh Kita*. She was one of the people who established the Gerindo branch in Semarang. She was appointed the first manpower minister 1947–1948. See, entry in *Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*, p. 293.

[163] PPO, April-July 1941, in Poeze (ed.), *Politieke-Politioneele Overzichten*, Part 4, 1935–1941.

[164] *Pemandangan*, 17 May 1941.

sector unions, including the Semarang unions that had formed GASPI at the beginning of the year. The 31 unions claimed a membership of nearly 19,000. Most were based in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya. The meeting formed a new GASPI, to be based in Batavia, as a national federation of private sector unions. Suroso and Hindromartono were elected first and second chairmen respectively, with Suprapto and Sukarto as first and second secretaries. The PVPN's P5 group had taken control. The new GASPI immediately called on the government to recognise it in the same way it recognised the PVPN. [165] One month later, some 4,000 people attended a public meeting in Semarang organised by GASPI to hear union leaders such as Suprapto and Jusuf urge privately employed workers to join a union. Hindromartono followed up in Batavia, with the formation of a GASPI branch in September. Over the next few months GASPI local groups were formed in other cities in Java, alongside local PVPN groups. The formation of GASPI, and its interlocking leadership with the PVPN committee for private sector workers, was an important step towards the creation of one national labour union federation.[166]

The Idea of a Labour Party

After unions linked to the communist party were crushed in late 1926 and early 1927, labour union leaders were wary of close structural links between labour unions and political parties. This did not prevent political parties having labour union departments nor prevent them from trying to organise workers in the private sector. However, they consistently claimed that they were creating industrial organisations, structurally separate from the political parties and not involved in political activities. The nature of the relationship between labour unions and political parties was an on-going debate. In December 1937, the debate moved in a new direction when Hindromartono proposed that the PVPN nominate its own candidates for the 1938 municipal elections. The proposal was hotly debated, with strong opposition from the federation of teacher unions' Atik Suardi and the nurses and midwives union's Ruslan Wongsokusumo, both of whom were proponents of a clear separation between labour unions and political parties. The decision of the PVPN Congress was disputed, with Hindromartono

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[165] *Pemandangan*, 31 July 1941 and *Kereta Api*, 10 August 1941.

[166] On the creation of GASPI and its early meetings see, *Kereta Api*, 10 August, and 25 August-10 September 1941, *Orgaan PTTR*, June, August and September 1941.

arguing that it acknowledged that in some cities local PVPNs could nominate their own candidates for municipal elections and Ruslan arguing that it had rejected Hindromartono's proposals.[167]

Whatever the Congress decision, Hindromartono persuaded leading members of the Batavia branch of Parindra to support him. On 17 March 1938, a meeting was convened of all local union branches to discuss the formation of a Labour Party in Batavia. Representatives of 20 unions met at the house of Parindra member and Batavian union leader Subroto and decided to form a Jakarta Labour Front, with Hindromartono as chairman, and Subroto as vice-chairman. Other prominent Parindra people, including the branch chairman Darjono, were also involved. The public announcement stated that workers needed support from the wider society, especially from political parties, and that over many years this support had been inadequate. The Labour Front intended to change this. Its initial task was to get members elected to the Batavia Municipal Council, but its long run aim was to get members elected to all representative bodies, including the provincial councils and the Volksraad.[168]

A few days earlier, the Batavia newspaper *Pemandangan* had published an extensive interview with Hindromartono in which he made the case for the creation of a Labour Party. Labour unions, he argued, needed to engage not just with employers but also with governments. Municipal councils were especially important because they made decisions that impacted directly on workers' lives. They determined the cost of water and the cost of burial plots, they imposed a range of taxes and were responsible for the cleanliness of the kampung where Indonesian workers' lived. While he acknowledged the work of political parties in the Volksraad and local councils in supporting labour unions and lower paid workers, Hindromartono was critical of the National Fraction in the Volksraad. He accused its members, with the exception of Suroso, of siding with the government over the 1938 central wages regulations. Using the analogy of a child needing to decrease its dependence on its parents as it grew up, he argued that it was time for workers to represent themselves rather than continuing to rely on

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[167] For Ruslan Wongsokusumo's view, see the report on his speech to a Parindra course in *Soeara Oemoem*, 10 November 1938. For Hindromartono's response, see "Gambaran Palsu dari Tuan Ruslan Wongsokusumo jg perlu di benarkan", in *Kereta Api*, November-December 1938, pp. 122–124.

[168] *Soeara Oemoem*, 21 March 1938, *Kereta Api*, January-February-March 1938, p. 32, *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 23 March and 1 August 1938, *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 19 March 1938.

political parties to represent their interests. A Labour Party would be totally focussed on the needs of lower paid workers. [169]

Asked about the convictions of many Indonesian labour union leaders that unions should stay away from politics, Hindromartono argued that all labour union activity was politics. He agreed that Indonesian labour unions should not be involved with the existing political parties, but believed that this should not prevent them from forming their own political party. Nor indeed was he averse to labour union involvement with political parties if it was on the basis of absolute equality. He admired the relationship between the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party in England, where the Labour Party emerged from the labour movement to represent workers' interests in parliament, but the labour movement retained its structural and financial independence. He also admired the relationship between the Netherlands Federation of Labour Unions and the Social Democratic Workers Party (SDAP) in the Netherlands, because while there was close cooperation between the two organisations, each retained its independence and neither was subservient to the other.[170]

Over the next few months the Jakarta Labour Front held a number of public meetings, organised in cooperation with the Batavia branch of Parindra. At the end of July, a large crowd heard Hindromartono praise the success of unions in Europe in forcing governments to provide decent housing for workers. Indonesian workers, he said, also needed better housing and improvements to the urban areas in which they lived. He went on to state that the Labour Front wanted the gap between higher and lower paid workers considerably reduced and the existing flat rate of income tax replaced by progressive rates. He saw two possible directions for the Labour Front. It could evolve into a Labour Party or it could simply become an organisation uniting Jakarta public and private sector unions, because "The Jakarta Labour Front is a servant of the entire working class. It cannot itself decide to become a Labour Party, that is a decision of the working class itself."[171]

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[169] The extensive interview with Hindromartono was published in *Pemandangan* on 14 March 1938 and reprinted in *Kereta Api*, January-February-March 1938, pp. 30–32.

[170] See, Hindromartono's speech to the Mataram Congress of the PPST, June 1939, in *Kereta Api*, July-August 1939.

[171] Speech of Hindromartono at a public meeting organised by the Jakarta branch of Parindra, 31 July 1938, *Soeara Oemoem*, 4 August 1938. See also, a report in *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 1 August 1938.

Support for Hindromartono from the Batavia branch of Parindra was at odds with the view of the Surabaya-based central leadership of Parindra. It did not want a potential competitor and would have opposed the creation of any new political party, especially one based in Batavia. It was particularly opposed to a class-based party, which claimed to represent the interests of lower level workers. The Surabaya Parindra people saw their party not just as the pre-eminent nationalist political party but also as the party that had demonstrated through its social and economic activities over many years a commitment to improving the living conditions of workers and farmers. The Parindra argument was summed up in a lengthy analysis of the labour movement published by *Soeara Oemoem* in January 1939. It agreed with Hindromartono that the labour movement was an important part of the national movement but argued that it must always work in harmony with the national movement and with the political parties. It rejected the concept of a Labour Party, arguing "… that a Labour Party is of no use and is not necessary for our country, especially because the people who want to create a labour party are not clear about its actual aims and objectives."[172]

The unease within the Parindra leadership was on display at its Congress in December 1938. Parindrist and Volksraad member Sukardjo Wirjopranoto delivered a lengthy speech on "Politics and the labour movement", in which he criticised what he called the move to politicise the labour movement. He reiterated the Parindra view that labour unions must have nothing to do with politics or religion because this would weaken and divide the labour movement:

> Parindra holds to one principle. The labour movement must not be involved in politics. It is dangerous for the organisation itself. There is the correct place for every activity.
>
> For example, a bedroom is used for sleeping not for eating. If someone eats in a bedroom that means he is sick and there is a chance he will die[173]

Parindra was divided in its respone to Hindromartono's push for a Labour Party, with Surabaya headquarters failing to stop the Batvaian branch from supporting him. The PVPN was also divided. The strongest opposition came from the federation of teacher unions and the nurses' union.[174] The union

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172 "Pergerakan Sekerdja", *Soeara Oemoem*, 23 January 1939.

173 *Soeara Oemoem*, 2 January 1939. He stated that public sector workers had the right to be involved in politics but at the same time they should do their job responsibly.

174 Atik Suardi of the federation of teacher unions stated that he was not in principle opposed to the creation of a Labour Party. However, he believed that there must first be

for middle level post and telegraph workers (Midpost), was lukewarm, arguing that it was premature.[175] The strongest support came from the railway workers' union, the union for lower level post and telegraph workers and the assistant teachers' union, all of which represented lower paid workers and were expanding rapidly in the late 1930s. The magazine of the assistant teachers' union editorialised that Labour Parties in Europe had brought great benefits to workers and that a Labour Party in Indonesia would bring similar benefits. Using to its own advantage the Parindra slogan about creating a "Kemuliaan Indonesia" (Glorious Indonesia), it stated that, "Workers' future is dependent on their involvement in politics. Glorious Indonesia, *and its people* [emphasis added], if Indonesia achieves this."[176]

The pawnshop workers' union also saw the potential benefits of a Labour Party. Hindromartono was invited to speak on the subject to at least one of its public meetings. Drijowongso, vice-chairman of the union, wrote in the union magazine that he was impressed by the success of the Labour Front in winning seats in the Batavia Municipal Council. Why, he asked, did the political parties not have strong programs on issues concerning workers. He accused the political parties of giving little support to the labour unions' campaign against the 1938 BBL. It was little wonder, he argued, that workers' were now looking to advance their interests in the political sphere themselves.[177]

Hindromartono's approach to the Batavia Municipal Council elections antagonised Batavian leaders of political parties other than Parindra. For previous elections the political parties had created an electoral committee, which negotiated a common list of Indonesian nominees. In 1938 it proposed to follow its normal procedure of allowing each party no more than one nominee. This did not satisfy Hindromartono and the Labour Front, which insisted on nominating its own list of candidates.[178] Supported by

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much stronger industry-based unions and more certainty about the possible directions of a Labour Party. See, his interview in *Pemandangan*, 5 August 1941.

[175] In November 1938 the central executive of *Midpost* stated that it did not agree with the proposal for the creation of a Labour Party. It noted that the existing political parties were not in favour because it would weaken their position and that *Soeara Oemoem* was opposed because there were already people in the Volksraad who promoted the interests of workers. It believed that the major impediment was that there were no private sector unions. It would only support the labour movement creating a Labour Party after it included private sector as well as public sector workers. *Het Postblad*, November 1938, p. 377–379.

[176] "Partij Buruh", *Tridaja*, August 1938.

[177] Drijowongoso, "'Partij' Kaum Buruh", *Doenia Pegadaian*, 5 September 1938.

[178] "Gado Gado Betawai", *Soeara Oemoem*, 12 April 1938

Pemandangan, the elections resulted in the Labour Front winning 6 of the 11 positions for Indonesians.[179] The other five were won by Parindra candidates. This success emboldened Hindromartono again to raise the issue at a PVPN delegates meeting at the end of September. After another heated debate between supporters and opponents, the meeting shelved the issue by establishing a commission, chaired by Sukiman from the pawnshop workers' union, and including Hindromartono and Ruslan as two of the six members. The public debate between Hindromartono and Ruslan continued, becoming more polemical and more personal. It was impossible for the commission to devise a position acceptable to both men and Sukiman quickly handed back the mandate to the PVPN executive.[180]

In his contribution to the special Parindra Congress number of *Soeara Oemoem*, in December 1938, Suroso referred to the strong debates within Parindra and the PVPN about the relationship between labour unions and political parties and whether or not there should be a Labour Party. He was clearly equivocal. He only rarely used the language of class struggle himself and was no social revolutionary. But he rejected ostentation and shared with Sutomo a conviction that the better off in society, especially the new intellectual elite, had a public duty to serve their society. As a union leader, as chairman of the PVPN, and in his substantial contributions in the Volksraad, he had consistently advocated improving the wages and conditions of lower paid workers, reducing the gap between the higher and lower paid and increasing taxes on the higher paid as well as on the foreign owned plantation and oil companies. He respected Hindromartono for the way he had revitalised the railway workers' union and had worked closely with him in the PVPN. He sympathised with Hindromartono's arguments:

> … every nationalist political party, about 80 per cent of whose members are workers, must consider the issue of the best relationship between a political party and a labour union. Is it fitting for a labour union to be within every political party only as a unit or instrument to achieve that party's objectives? Is that the healthiest relationship, bearing in mind that we want to achieve powerful labour unions?[181]

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[179] The electorate for Indonesians was so restricted that only 2,136 people voted. See, *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 13 August 1938.

[180] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 10 December 1938. The debate was conducted in the pages of *Soeara Oemoem* and *Pemandangan.*

[181] Congress Nummer Parindra, p. 17, published as a supplement to *Soeara Oemoem*, 22 December 1938.

Hindromartono continued to advocate the creation of a Labour Party by the labour movement, despite opposition from Parindra and the lukewarm response from many PVPN unions. The working class, he argued, was at the centre of Indonesian political, economic and social life. It had a duty to shape the development of society. He rejected the view put forward by Parindra that "nusa dan bangsa" (homeland) was a sufficient basis for organisations seeking to promote the interests of workers, stating that "The principle of nationalism on its own, with no group able to explain its content, does not provide a guarantee for a group which is "masih bodoh", the worker."[182] If workers did not see political parties representing their interests then they had a duty to create their own party. He was scathing of those who criticised a labour movement for advocating class struggle and rejected the notion that a class struggle would work against the broader interests of Indonesian society:

> It is not accurate to say that it is the labour movement that creates class struggle. This view is put forward by people who have forgotten human nature, or by a group like those mentioned above, or by those who in reality are not happy seeing the working class struggle. It is true that the words 'class struggle' were first used by the labour movement. What must be avoided by those who love Indonesia, as well as by the Indonesian worker, is conflict that seeks to destroy another group without any concern for the public interest. For this reason, the Indonesian labour movement does not neglect the general community interest in our homeland.

For Hindromartono it was not enough for political parties to rely on the 'nation' as a rallying cry. If they did not reflect the views and interests of workers then workers must create their own political party:

> The working class is the class of paramount importance in terms of social rights and duties, so that understanding the worker must be (one of) the focus of the political movement. Whether this focus can be achieved through parties that already exist, or through a new party, is dependent at the moment on several factors, most importantly on the worker himself.[183]

The Labour Front was formed to contest the 1938 Batavia Municipal Council elections. Having succeeded in getting its candidates elected, it seems to have become largely inactive. Hindromartono's energies were devoted to his new role as a member of the Council, his continuing leadership of the railway workers' union, his work with the PVPN and his efforts to orga-

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[182] Speech at a public meeting of the PTTR in July 1939, *Orgaan PTTR*, July-August 1939, p. 22.

[183] Ibid., p. 23.

nise private sector workers. In his speeches and writing, though, he continued to urge the labour movement to create a Labour Party.

By 1941 Hindromartono was openly irritated at opposition from Europeans and what he saw as timidity from Indonesians. For three years, he said, he had been advocating a Labour Party and had constantly been attacked from the "sana" (European) side with comments such as "You are a communist. You are an agent of Moscow. You are a red. … isn't Digul the place for you?" For its part, the "sini" (Indonesian) side had constantly cautioned that the time was not right and, more recently, that it would be dangerous to create one when Europe was at war. He disagreed. Now was precisely the right time to work for change. The threat of fascism in Europe was real and he was totally opposed to it, but at the same time he was convinced that a victory by western democracies was not in itself enough. After the war, the working classes throughout the world must have better social and legal rights and the gap between the rich and the poor must be narrowed. He referred timid Indonesians to voices in England which were calling for such changes even while England was at war:

> There is not one example in the history of the working class of an ideology other that the ideology of the worker being able to bring happiness to you and to a society dependent on people selling their labour.
>
> For this reason, gather together my friends, in order to support the true Labour Front.[184]

Three months later he returned to this theme, arguing that what he now called the "Labour Political Front" must move the labour movement beyond its industrial and social welfare roles in order to ensure that the future structure of society reflected the interests of workers:

> The Labour Political Front is a people's movement that seeks to create a New Society guided by the principle of 'Upholding workers' rights'....
>
> For a labour union or a labour union federation that does not intend actively to struggle in the political arena, which is the situation in Indonesia now, then a Labour Political Front is essential, because a large number of the issues affecting workers' lives are determined by the body politic, that is by government, either central or local.[185]

The idea of a Labour Party continued to be a major issue among labour union leaders. In August 1941, the Batavia newspaper *Pemandangan* pub-

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[184] Hindromartono, "Waktoenja mengakoei Hak Boeroeh", *Pemandangan*, 12 April 1941. The article was also published in *Kereta Api*, 25 April 1941, pp. 40–41.

[185] "Hak-hak dan Trimurti Gerakan Buruh Indonesia", *Kereta Api*, 25 July 1941, pp. 97–99.

lished a series of interviews with union leaders in which it asked their views on a set of issues, one of which was the creation of a Labour Party. There was universal support in principle but some reservations. Karta Muhari, vice chairman of the postal workers' union, believed that workers were not yet aware of the need for a Labour Party and that the current state of seige in the colony made it impossible to conduct a public campaign. Atik Suardi, chairman of the federation of teacher unions, believed that the labour movement was not yet sufficiently organised or consolidated, with the result that nationalism rather than class was still the stimulus for political engagement.[186] Suprapto and Jusuf, two of the leading Gerindo labour union activists, also had reservations. Jusuf raised the question of whether Indonesian unionists had a strong enough "worker consciousness". If the answer was negative then the proposal was premature. If it was affirmative then he believed that it would better if Gerindo transformed itself into a Labour Party. Both he and Suprapto argued that the aims of the proposed Labour Party were very similar to those of Gerindo.[187]

Suprapto and Jusuf were not the only Gerindo leaders who saw advocacy for a Labour Party as a threat to their own ambitions. In August 1941, the executive of the Surabaya branch of Gerindo discussed Hindromartono's ideas at some length, before suggesting that Gerindo might take the initiative and consciously align itself with Indonesian workers by changing its name to Partai Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Labour Party). It stated that it did not want a separate Labour Party because this would only result in competition between two groups with the same ideology.[188] The third Congress of Gerindo, held in Batavia in October 1941, finally determined the party's position. It resolved to oppose the creation of a Labour Party because Gerindo was a party based not just on nationalism but also on the promotion of political, social and economic democracy. Members were forbidden from supporting the creation of a Labour Party.[189] There is no record of Hindromartono's reaction to these discussions in Gerindo circles. They were soon overtaken by the outbreak of war in the Pacific and the Japanese occupation of the Indies. The outcome sought by Gerindo people in 1941 was found in the Socialist Party formed by Sjahrir in December 1945, which Hindromartono and many former Gerindo activists quickly joined.

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186 *Pemandangan*, 5, 7 and 12 August 1941.

187 See, Suprapto, "Sarekat sekerdja dan partij politiek", *Pemandanga*n, 11 January 1941 and an interview with Jusuf, "Keterangan pemimpin Sarekat Sekerdja", *Pemandangan*, 7 August 1941.

188 *Pemandangan*, 8 August 1941, *Orgaan PTTR*, August 1941, p. 17.

189 *Pemandangan*, 15 October 1941.

The Approach of War

In May 1940 Germany invaded the Netherlands. The Indies government immediately declared martial law, prohibited all public political meetings and required all private political meetings to give five days notice. The Indies press, both Dutch and Indonesian, had closely followed the rise of fascism in the 1930s, Germany's invasion of Eastern Europe and the course of the Allied war campaign. Nevertheless, the occupation of the Netherlands came as a shock. The immediate response of Indonesian political and labour union leaders was to express sympathy for the people of the Netherlands, total opposition to fascism, and support of the Allies in the war.

In June 1940, the PVPN responded to requests from affiliated union for directions in the light of events in Europe. In a widely publicised public statement it declared that civil servants in PVPN unions recognised that they had a responsiblity to stand behind the government at this difficult time.[190] It was opposed to fascism and strongly supported the Allied war effort. However, this expression of loyalty did not deter it from continuing the campaign for improvements in wages and conditions for workers. Indeed, in the light of events in Europe it saw an opportunity to force concessions from the colonial government. Djoko Said reflected the widespread view when in December 1940 he told the 3rd Congress of the postal workers' union, the PTTR, that the union strongly supported the government at this time of war in Europe "… but will also continue to request, and demand, the rights of post office workers to improvement in their livelihoods."[191]

In April 1941, the PVPN tried to reach agreement with the federation of European labour unions, the VVO, in order to make a joint demand on the government. The two federations agreed that wages for lower and middle level workers were too low and should be increased but could not agree on wages for higher level workers.[192] The PVPN wanted these wages reduced along with an end to expatriate wages.[193] This was simply not in the interests of VVO members. Atik Suardi's effort to get the Organised Labour Consultative Committee to support the PVPN position failed in the face of oppositon from representatives of the VVO. To the annoyance of Hindrom-

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190 *Kereta Api*, 15 June 1940.
191 *Pemandangan*, 6 January 1941.
192 *Spoorbond's Blad*, 16 September 1941, p. 152.
193 *Orgaan PTTR*, April 1941, pp. 2–3 and *Het Postblad*, August 1941, pp. 230–231.

artono, they asserted that the PVPN position did not represent the views of a number of important Indonesian labour unions.[194]

The war in Europe put an end to new expatriate labour, but the government refused to move on the race-based wages structure. In August, the Director of Justice responded to criticism from Suroso and other Indonesian members of the Volksraad about the race-based wages system and the poverty of lower paid workers by making clear its lack of regard for labour unions:

> A labour movement with shallow roots, and insecure or inexpert leadership, does more harm than good. It does not contribute to improving labour relations, instead prefers to sharpen conflicts.[195]

Indonesian hopes that the occupation of the Netherlands would persuade the government-in-exile to commit to meaningful political reform after the war were quickly dashed. Their mood quickly turned to exasperation at Dutch intransigence.[196] When nationalist parties opposed the Militia Bill introduced into the Volksraad in June 1941, labour unions were fully supportive of them. Nationalists had for some time called for the government to create a native militia but rejected the Militia Bill on the ground that it was conscription via a lottery, not a national army. In their view conscription could only be introduced after consultation with the Indonesian people through a proper parliament. Even the conservative public officials' union, the PPBB, opposed the Militia Bill, with Sutardjo, its leader in the Volksraad, openly criticising it both inside and outside the Volksraad and again calling for the creation of an autonomous Indonesia within the Dutch realm.[197] Indonesian newspapers reported in July that the Director of the Internal Administration had summoned the executive of the PPBB and that shortly afterwards an emergency meeting of the union replaced Sutardjo as chairman and appointed a new central executive. This renewed worries about the future for other public sector unions that criticised the government.[198]

Despite its dismissive view of Indonesian labour unions, the outbreak of war persuaded the colonial government to address two issues raised over

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194 See, article by Hindromartono in *Orgaan PTTR*, July 1941, pp. 2–4.

195 Quoted in *Het Postblad*, September 1941, p. 275.

196 There is an extensive discussion in Abeyasekere, *One Hand Clapping: Indonesian Nationalists and the Dutch 1939–1942*, pp. 57–91.

197 Ibid., p. 74.

198 There is an extensive report in *Pemandangan*, 9 July 1941, which quoted reports in *Soeara Oemoem*.

many years by labour unions and their supporters in the Volksraad. First, was the lack of any redress for private sector workers over wages and conditions, or over arbitrary treatment by employers. Indonesian labour union leaders had long argued that the Labour Office had neither the powers nor the resources to police wages and conditions of workers employed by private companies. In December 1940, the government established a Labour Affairs Commission with limited regulatory powers over private employers. The occupation of the Netherlands had broken the links between Dutch companies in the colony and their head offices, resulting in cash flow and capital difficulties that the government feared might force companies to sack large numbers of workers, significantly cut wages or renege on the pension rights of retirees. As the Director of Justice explained to the first meeting of the Commission, the government feared that any such action could lead to considerable unrest.[199] The composition of the Commission indicated that the colonial government was more concerned about possible unrest among European workers than among Indonesians. Of the twenty members there were seven representatives from labour unions, only one of which, Hindromartono, was from an Indonesian labour union.

The Labour Affairs Commission was not intended to be an Arbitration Commission, but in the context of the war was given considerable powers over employers. Those employing more than 20 workers could no longer carry out mass dismissals, or cut wages, conditions or pension rights, without the prior approval of the Commission. If the Commission did not approve, the Director of Justice would make the final decision. If an employer had less than 20 workers, individual workers could refer an issue to the Commission for determination. In these cases the Commission determination was final.

Indonesian labour unions cautiously welcomed the move, while arguing that it did not go far enough to provide legal protection to workers. Suroso reminded the government that the colony's labour laws still protected European workers far more than they did Indonesians. [200] He was particularly critical of the fact that the Commission's rulings were not binding on large employers. The Director of Justice could overrule them. He wanted all industrial matters, for employers large and small, and whether of an

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[199] *Verslag van de Werkzaamheid van de Commissie voor Arbeidsaangelegenheden gedurende het tijdvak 20 December 1940 tot 18 August 1941*, p. 3.

[200] See the Volksraad speech of Suroso in *Volksraad Handelingen*, 28 October 1940, pp. 670–672.

individual or a collective nature, to be part of the Commission's remit. In other words, he wanted an Arbitration Commission.[201] He was also critical that decisions of the Commission had to be unanimous, stating that while he would avoid accusing employers of trying to "sabotage" the Commission, nevertheless its representatives could effectively block any decision of which they did not approve. Despite these reservations, through 1941 union leaders pointed to the creation of the Commission as an example of what could be achieved by labour unions and a further reason why workers should become members.[202]

The second issue on which the colonial government conceded ground concerned pensions for the children of deceased Indonesian government workers. This remained an issue after the government caved in to the seven-year campaign of the PVPN and the VVO to allow Indonesian public sector workers access to widows' but not to orphans' pensions. In August 1940, it finally agreed to allow Indonesian workers access to both funds. Again, though, it infuriated Indonesians by proposing different rules for Indonesians from those for Europeans. The orphans' pension would be a smaller percentage of salary for Indonesians, would cut out when a child reached 18 years, instead of 21 years for a European, and only Indonesians earning more than 50 guilders a month would be eligible. Suroso moved a series of amendments in the Volksraad, once again attacking the goverment for making race a factor in determining wages and conditions. The government eventually caved in on the rate of payment and the eligibility age but retained the 50 guilder floor and refused to extend the fund to monthly and daily wage earners, arguing that it could not afford to support the majority of its Indonesian workers. Although getting only part of they had long fought for, Indonesian labour unions trumpeted this as a victory for the PVPN.[203]

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[201] Suroso argued that "It is clear that the government at the moment still has done very little for Indonesian employees. It is now time that the government begins to create a full system of labour legislation, not only for European but also for Indonesian employees." *Volksraad Handelingen*, 28 October 1940, p. 671.

[202] See an article by Hindromartono 'Ordannansi "Regeling Arbeidsverhouding". Kaum Buruh Partikulir Bersatulah!', first published in *Pemandangan* and reprinted in *Het Postblad*, January 1941.

[203] *Kereta Api*, 5 July and 20 August 1940; *Orgaan PTTR*, August and September 1940. The PTTR, many of whose members earned less than 50 guilders a month, saw this decision as yet one more reason for a class struggle, calling on postal workers: "Workers from all strata. Join our PTTR! Stir up class struggle!" *Orgaan PTTR*, September 1940, p. 6.

The Labour Movement in 1942

In January 1941, Sukarto, secretary of the central executive of the KPM workers' union and a former PNI Baru leader, reflected on the condition of the labour movement in Indonesia. The fundamental weakness, he argued, was that Indonesian workers lacked the class consciousness of workers in Europe. Too many workers still saw themselves as "priyayi" (administrative elite) rather than "buruh" (workers) or as "buruh halus" (white collar workers) as opposed to the mass of workers who were "buruh kasar" (manual workers). In his view, this mentality hindered the emergence of a strong and united labour movement. One reason for this state of affairs, he believed, was that the Indonesian labour movement was much younger than the European movements and had not yet had the time to develop class consciousness among workers. But the major reason, he argued, was that the Indonesian education system was designed to produce "civil servants". Moreover, even if the education system changed it would have to overcome a deep-seated mentality:

> Children have been brought up from very young with the belief that they later will have a position [as a civil servant] with a high salary and a happy life. People believed, that a person who controlled a penholder had a happier life than a blacksmith. To this day, this sort of spirit is still in the Indonesian soul.

In order to be successful, labour unions had to change this mindset. He was convinced that workers in every industry, irrespective of the status of their jobs, must become members of the one union and that all unions must work together. He looked forward to the PVPN becoming a national federation for both public and private sector workers.[204]

Sukarto was stating more clearly and more forcefully what labour activists had been saying for decades. Many were frustrated by the status divisions in Indonesian workplaces. Progress seemed painfully slow on educating workers to set aside these differences in order to create a strong and united labour movement. Yet by 1942 much had been achieved. The Indonesian labour movement was organisationally and financially stronger than it had ever been. Public sector union membership was at record levels. In early 1941, for example, the pawnshop workers' union had over 5,000 members, or about 90 per cent of the total Indonesian workforce in the pawnshops. It had assets in excess of 22,000 guilders, including a two-sto-

[204] *Kemadjoean*, January 1941, pp. 16–22.

ry headquarters in Yogyakarta, and branches in 398 of the 461 pawnshops.[205] Around two-thirds of the Indonesian teachers in public schools were union members. In July 1941, the Persatuan Guru Indonesia, the federation of teacher unions, purchased a building in Batavia for its headquarters at a cost of 17,500 guilders.[206] In September 1941, 2,000 of the 2,500 assistant teachers were members of the PGB and theTasikmalaya branch cooperative had a capital of 16,000 guilders.[207] Over one-third of railway workers were members of the PPST. At the other extreme, the small land registry workers' union claimed a membership of more than 90 per cent of the almost 400 Indonesian work force. There were also encouraging signs of a resurgence in private sector unions. With almost 19,000 members, unions for workers in tbe private sector were stronger in 1941 than they had been since 1926.

There were also positive signs in the decades old effort to create a single national labour union federation. The PVPN had grown to 20 member unions in 1941 and for the first time had been promised financial support from the Netherlands Federation of Labour Unions. The NVV undertook to provide 3,000 guilders a year for 1940 and 1941 and 2,000 guilders for 1942.[208] GASPI was in its infancy but, given that its leadership was the core of the PVPN leadership, there was a strong chance that public and private sector unions might in time be brought together into one body. Local GASPI groups had already begun to work with local PVPN groups.

Labour unions for Chinese workers were also showing renewed energy. In May 1939 the six small Chinese labour unions in the major Java cities of Batavia, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Semarang and Surabaya formed the Federatie Kaum Buruh Tionghoa (Federation of Chinese Labour Unions) and began publication of a monthly magazine.[209] When the colonial government established the Labour Affairs Committee in December 1940, the federation of Chinese labour unions successfully nominated Ko Kwat Tiong as a member. Ko was a Netherlands educated lawyer in Semarang and adviser to the Federation.[210] While total membership of the six Chinese la-

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205 *Pemandangan*, 2 and 10 April 1941.

206 *Persatoean Goeroe*, July 1941.

207 *Pemandangan*, 29 September 1941.

208 *Orgaan PTTR*, March 1940.

209 See, *Soeara Kong Kie Hwee*, May 1940

210 *Soeara Kong Kie Hwee*, November 1940. Ko Kwat Tiong represented the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (the Indonesian Chinese Party formed in Surabaya in 1932) in the Volksraad from 1935 to 1939. After independence he changed his name to Mohammad Saleh. See the entry in Leo Suryadinata, *Prominent Indonesian Chinese. Biographical Sketches* (Singapore:

bour unions remained low—estimated to be only 1,369 in 1940—leaders of the federation and its component unions began to appear on public platforms with Indonesian labour unions. The few editions of their magazines that have survived show them trying to fnd ways of working more closely with the broader labour movement.

There was even a little more recognition from the colonial government and the Netherlands government-in-exile in London. After considerable hesitation, and arguments over how much of the cost was to be covered by the government, the Netherlands had agreed to fund Sukiman to be part of the NVV delegation to the 1940 International Labour Organisation conference in Geneva. His role was to provide advice to the delegation on the situation of labour in the colony. A year later, in 1941, Hindromartono was included in the Netherlands labour delegation to the International Labour Organisation Conference in New York.[211] The Indonesian language press reported extensively on both conferences, seeing the attendance of the prominent labour activists as important international exposure for the Indonesian labour movement.

On 8 December 1941 Japanese imperial forces bombed Pearl harbour, bringing both the United States and the Netherlands Indies into the Pacific War. GASPI and the PVPN called on all workers to support the colonial government in the fight against fascism. They were assured that unions would continue to protect their interests and urged to remain members.[212] The outbreak of the Pacific War and the impending threat of invasion brought Indonesian political and labour union activism to a halt. On 10 March 1942 the Netherlands Indies armed forces surrendered to the invading Japanese. On 20 March the new imperial power in Indonesia prohibited all political and labour union activity.

Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), pp. 138–139. See also, Nio Joe Lan, "Chineesche Vakvereenigingen in Nederlandsch-Indie", *Koloniale Studien*, Vol. 24 (1940), pp. 77–93.

[211] *Doenia Pegadaian*, 10 and 25 May 1939; *Orgaan PTTR*, October 1941.

[212] *Soeara Oemoem*, 5 and 6 January 1942.

CONCLUSION

The Japanese occupation of Indonesia lasted only three years. They were dreadful years for most Indonesians, but not long enough to erase the personal and collective memories of union and political activism in the 1920s and 1930s. In the aftermath of the declaration of independence in August 1945, labour unions were quickly re-formed. Freed from the restrictions of the colonial state, they expanded rapidly from industries that had previously been unionised into industries that the pre-war movement was unable to reach.

The declaration of independence was a pivotal event in the modern history of Indonesia. It marked the beginning of a period of enormous turmoil as new and old forces competed for popular support and control of the state. Labour unions, now much larger and more comprehensive, were important players in this contest. While the political, social and economic context of post-independence Indonesia was very different from that of the 1920s and 1930s, this should not obscure the continuities in the history of the labour movement. The post-1926 labour movement in particular, while of necessity less militant than in earlier years, had a significant impact on the programs and actions of labour unions after independence. The divide between colonial and post-colonial Indonesia was in many ways less sharp than arbitrary periodisation often suggests. For labour unions, independence was an important achievement but did not mark an entirely new beginning.

Many of the key political and labour union leaders after 1945 had been active in labour unions in the 1930s. Hatta, for example, became Vice-President when independence was declared in August 1945. Sjahrir and Sukiman had periods as Prime Ministers, and S.K. Trimurti and Suroso as Ministers. Hindromartono became a founding member of the executive of Sjahrir's PSI on its establishment in December 1945. Mohammad Jusuf and Suprapto founded the new PKI in October 1945. Others took on central or local leadership of new labour unions. The social and economic agendas they championed were shaped by their pre-war experiences. Ideological and personal differences in the late 1920s and the 1930s were contained by the fact that there was a common enemy. In the more open atmosphere of post-independence, when power and influence were clearly at stake, these

differences became more sharply defined and fought out more fiercely in the political domain.

The pre-war experiences and remembered histories helped shape the agendas of post-independence labour unions and the relationships between labour unions, political parties and the state. They were the base on which the mass labour movement of the late 1940s and the 1950s was built. In workplaces and kampung, people who had been local leaders in the colonial labour movement took up where they had left of, energised by the radically changed political environment and less fearful of state or employer retribution. In mobilising workers and creating new unions they drew on their earlier experiences and networks. They were fervent supporters of the new Republic, but they were soon confronting not just employers but also the newly independent state.

Fundamental issues that had divided the labour movement in the late 1920s and the 1930s resurfaced and continued to divide. Should unions be industry or status based? Should they be based on religious affiliation? Should they be engaged in class-struggle? Should they be independent or instruments of political parties? In mobilising workers, labour activists also faced many of the same challenges that had confronted pre-independence unions: challenges created by stratified workplaces, and divisions of ethnicity, class, religion, gender and ideology. For their part, Indonesian political leaders struggled to establish the authority of the new state. While mostly sympathetic to labour unions, they were forced to confront the difficult issues of managing labour disputes and negotiating the place of organised labour in the body politic.

In the last decades of colonial rule, the Netherlands Indies government crushed political activity, severely curtailed the right of association and assembly, prohibited strikes and imposed tough press laws. Those who openly challenged its power were jailed or exiled. But the outward appearance of 'tranquillity and order' masked the growth of a civil society outside the control of the state. The development of a stronger civil society was a major objective of all Indonesian organisations. Those who led the enormous growth in the 1930s in labour unions, Islamic organisations, education institutions, cooperatives, cultural groups, socio-economic associations and sporting clubs often said that what they were doing was creating "a state within a state". By the end of the 1930s they had succeeded to a far greater extent than was realised by those who ruled the Indies.

Labour unions were major contributors to the growth of this civil society in the 1930s. They were significant grassroots organisations. Through

branch meetings, mutual benefit funds and social welfare groups, and the provision of libraries, educational courses and sporting clubs, labour unions involved tens of thousands of workers in the towns and cities of Java. In the process they reached deep into workers' lives. Unions were, by and large, democratic organisations, engaging ordinary workers in decision-making and empowering them to become involved in improving their lives. In the late 1920s and the 1930s labour unions involved ordinary people in their activities far more than political parties. Freedom of speech and assembly were so restricted that overt political activity had little public space in which to move. While the public space for labour unions was also restricted, the nature of their activities and their branch structures enabled them to maintain contact with urban workers in ways that political parties could not.

The colonial state did nothing to support the development of labour unions. It frequently talked about creating 'healthy' labour unions, but was never at ease with Indonesian unions. Every major proposal put forward by union leaders was rejected out of hand, ignored, or staunchly resisted. Every concession had to be fought for, often over many years. In the final analysis the state served the interests of foreign capital, and the prime need of foreign capital was cheap and docile labour. Under pressure from sugar, plantation and oil interests the colonial government determined to keep taxes and royalties low, which meant minimising public expenditure. It had only limited interest in an educated Indonesian population. The colonial state and foreign capital were aware of the long-term threat posed by Indonesian labour unions and did all that they could to thwart them.

In the second, less militant, phase of the Indonesian labour movement, unions became adept at exerting pressure on the government while staying clear of the draconian laws designed to entrap them. Public rallies and representations to officials were complemented with widely distributed magazines and brochures. They received strong support from Indonesian members of the Volksraad, who ensured that issues raised by them were openly debated, all of which put further pressure on the government. The alliances with European labour unions, though often problematic, increased the effectiveness of this pressure. The government was well aware of the grassroots support of labour unions, and aware also of their connections with labour unions and social-democrat politicians in the Netherlands. All of this placed limits on its ability to constrain labour unions.

In the decade and a half after the failed communist uprisings of 1926/1927, Indonesian labour unions developed a coherent industrial, social

and economic platform. They were major forums for debate on social, economic and industrial issues, establishing much of the agenda for post-independence Indonesia. While there were ideological differences between unions, differences that were to become more open and more divisive after independence, there was a broad consensus on many issues. Unions demanded freedom of association and the right to strike, a minimum wage, maximum hours of work and stronger controls on child and female labour. They also demanded improved social laws, such as age pensions and unemployment pay, a reduction in the gap between higher and lower paid workers, a progressive taxation structure and higher royalties on the extraction of minerals, energy and plantation products. There was a strong conviction that Indonesia must move from being a low wage, low skills, extractive economy to an industrialised society. For this to happen there must be universal education and an expansion of higher education in order to free Indonesia from the need to import skilled foreign workers, and an industrialisation policy driven by state-owned industries. There was a widespread distrust of foreign capital.

Most fundamentally, although constrained by the anti-strike laws and the relentless surveillance of the colonial state, labour unions after 1926 were strong advocates for workers, providing a voice for those who had little or no power as individuals. They were sympathetic listeners to workers' grievances and effective defenders of victims of unfair or arbitrary actions. They educated workers to see their individual grievances in the broader context of the struggle between capital and labour. They were often able to transform these grievances into collective campaigns against employers. The very presence of Indonesian labour unions forced supervisors to be more careful in the way they treated workers. Employers did not like union interference, and did whatever they could to undermine them, but despite a legal framework heavily weighted in their favour, they could not ignore them. Unions became adept at taking workers' grievances into the public sphere and campaigning for redress. Despite the constraints of colonial rule, unions were also prepared to take employers to Court to enforce workers' rights. Thousands of individual workers were better off because of the successful advocacy of labour unions to employers, government or the Courts.

Labour unions have unique interests, goals, and trajectories, and distinct narratives. Even in democratic countries the interests of labour unions often diverge from those of the political parties created by, or closely connected to, them. The fundamental agenda of Indonesian labour unions was

to improve the wages and conditions of workers and to create a greater measure of social security by providing a wide range of mutual benefit funds and socio-economic institutions. However, Indonesia was a colony and labour activism was an integral part of nationalist politics. Union magazines and public meetings sought to develop worker consciousness and solidarity in the face of employers but the context was always anti-colonial. This was more obvious in the militant years prior to 1926, but was equally true in the less confrontationist years afterwards. In the late 1920s and the 1930s labour union magazines had an important role in promoting the idea of Indonesia and sustaining the drive for independence. Print runs of union magazines were large and distribution deep into urban society. Large union-organised protest meetings, well attended public meetings at annual Congresses and the ever-present nationalist symbols of flag, anthem and portraits of heroes, had political intent and impact. Many Indonesians discovered nationalist politics through their active involvement in labour unions.

From the earliest days of labour unions in the 1910s to the end of colonial rule in March 1942, Indonesian union leaders struggled to build organisations that cut across the ethnic, linguistic and social class divisions of Indonesian workplaces. They nurtured the shared experience of urban workers, introducing and sustaining a discourse of workers' rights. The right to controls on the length of the working day, a minimum wage, a fairer wages and taxation system, overtime, sickness, and holiday pay, a retirement pension, decent housing and access to education for their children. Above all, the right to be treated with fairness, justice and dignity in the workplace. They had an important industrial role in increasing workers' wages, representing their grievances to employers and forcing the colonial government to pressure employers into improving both wages and conditions. They had an important social, economic and cultural role, through mutual benefit associations, sporting clubs, education activities and the provision of shared social spaces. They contributed to the development of political consciousness, created opportunities for Indonesians to acquire organisational skills and provided a channel for many to deepen their sense of being Indonesian. It was these multiple and overlapping roles that made them a significant force in the lives of urban workers and a vital part of the broader national movement.

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UNSW

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

SYDNEY • AUSTRALIA

The Japanese occupation of Indonesia lasted only three years. They were dreadful years for most Indonesians, but not long enough to erase the personal and collective memories of union and political activism in the 1920s and 1930s. In the aftermath of the declaration of independence in August 1945, labour unions were quickly re-formed. Freed from the restrictions of the colonial state, they expanded rapidly from industries that had previously been unionised into industries that the pre-war movement was unable to reach.

The declaration of independence was a pivotal event in the modern history of Indonesia. It marked the beginning of a period of enormous turmoil as new and old forces competed for popular support and control of the state. Labour unions, now much larger and more comprehensive, were important players in this contest. While the political, social and economic context of post-independence Indonesia was very different from that of the 1920s and 1930s, this should not obscure the continuities in the history of the labour movement. The post-1926 labour movement in particular, while of necessity less militant than in earlier years, had a significant impact on the programs and actions of labour unions after independence. The divide between colonial and post-colonial Indonesia was in many ways less sharp than arbitrary periodisation often suggests. For labour unions, independence was an important achievement but did not mark an entirely new beginning.

Many of the key political and labour union leaders after 1945 had been active in labour unions in the 1930s. Hatta, for example, became Vice-President when independence was declared in August 1945. Sjahrir and Sukiman had periods as Prime Ministers, and S.K. Trimurti and Suroso as Ministers. Hindromartono became a founding member of the executive of Sjahrir's PSI on its establishment in December 1945. Mohammad Jusuf and Suprapto founded the new PKI in October 1945. Others took on central or local leadership of new labour unions. The social and economic agendas they championed were shaped by their pre-war experiences. Ideological and personal differences in the late 1920s and the 1930s were contained by the fact that there was a common enemy. In the more open atmosphere of post-independence, when power and influence were clearly at stake, these differences became more sharply defined and fought out more fiercely in the political domain.